

MR. SPINKS
AND HIS HOUNDS

F. M. LUTYENS

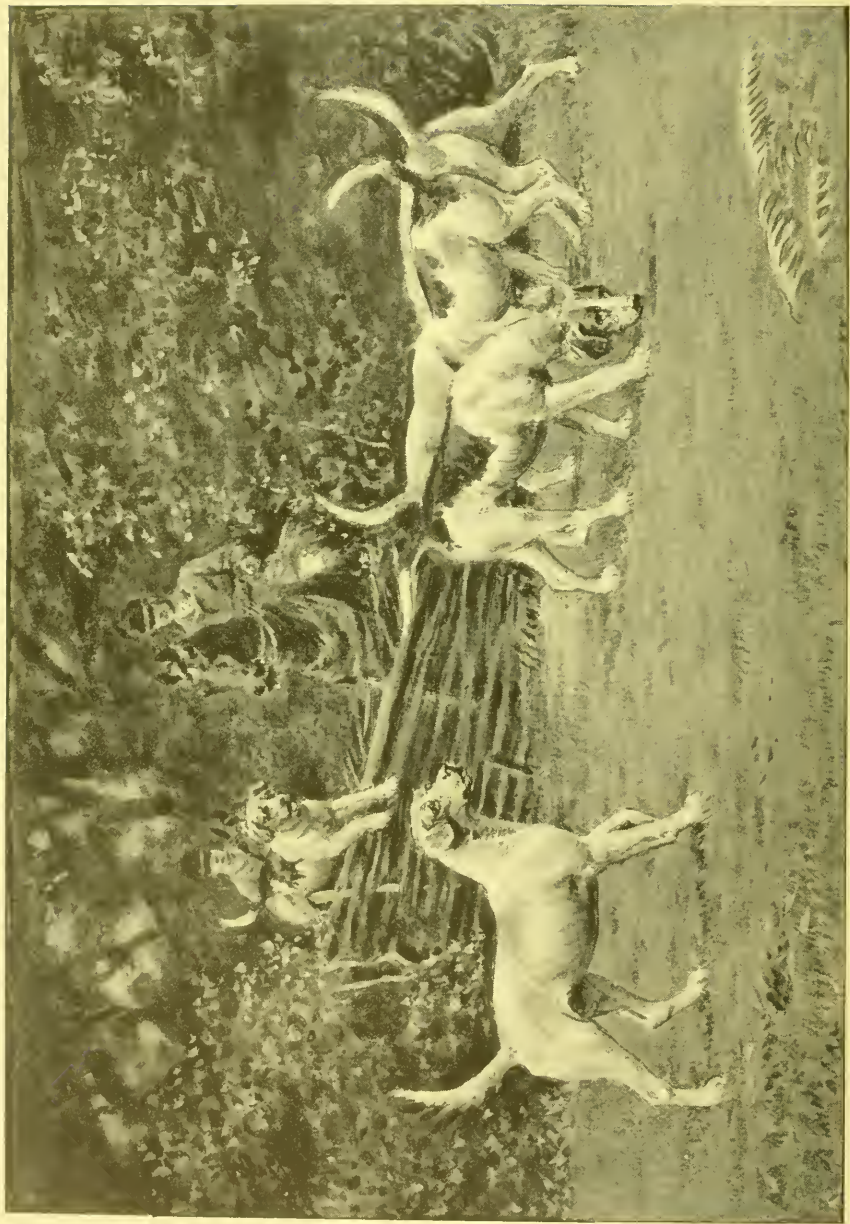


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MR. SPINKS AND HIS HOUNDS



THE BOSBY HOUNDS.

MR. SPINKS
AND HIS HOUNDS

A Hunting Story

BY

F. M. LUTYENS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

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MR. SPINKS AND HIS HOUNDS.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT the beginning of the reign of our gracious sovereign, Queen Victoria, there lived in Cheapside a hair-dresser, named Spinks. His shop was chiefly frequented by men of business, many of whom were members of the Stock Exchange. Of these he took a double advantage, picking their brains at the same time as he clipped their hair, something in the same way as the silversmith scrapes two shillings' worth of silver off his lordship's forks, and charges him eighteenpence for doing it.

The intelligence thus acutely acquired enabled him to invest the substantial profits accruing from the sale of his inimitable hair-wash to the best advantage ; and such was his good fortune in the choice of investments that by the time any ordinary hairdresser would have been merely in comfortable circumstances, Spinks was very well advanced into his second hundred thousand.

Notwithstanding this unprecedented success, he was loth to retire from business. For the barber's shop is notoriously the home of wit and gossip, and, being a witty man himself, he did not wish to risk losing the society of those who might not care, under other circumstances, to admit

him to a closer intimacy. His wealth, in short, did not tempt him to try the upper rungs of the social ladder. He would have dreaded nothing more than the solitary existence of the hermit whose untimely joke is born

“To waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

In the recesses of his heart, however, there lay a hidden force, an unknown quantity, that brought about this state of equilibrium. Possibly he was unconscious of its action upon himself, although perfectly aware that its influence over his customers produced a beneficial effect upon his business.



The attraction that made itself thus felt was a beautiful girl, Mary Hall by name, who stood behind the counter, and had supreme control of the ladies' department. She was a farmer's daughter, and till her eighteenth year had lived upon the farm, imbibing pure air, pure milk, and pure morals, when she came to London "to better herself," as wholesome a young woman as could be found between Land's End and John O'Groats.

Could we accurately describe the delicate form of her

nose, the dazzling depths of her blue eyes, the dimpled cheek, the rounded chin, the short curved lip, now jealously guarding, now generously revealing its pearly treasures, the richness of her colouring, and all the perfections of her features, we should still fail to give our reader an idea of the indescribable charm that pervaded them, the charm of an innocence born, not of ignorance, but of a wholesome use of a bright intelligence. "A beauty" of whom it could be said :

"There were none to praise,
And very few to love."

is happily a rarity. In the smallest village community which happens to contain a "Lucy," there are generally at least half a dozen swains eager to damage each other's faces in her cause. Unfortunately for Mary, the Lord of the Manor, a disreputable old nobleman, was to be counted among her lovers. His attentions were odious to her from the first, but when, three months after his wife's death, he began to make what he protested were honourable proposals, she found his advances so intolerable that she was compelled to place herself beyond his reach. Her beauty was thus the actual, though not the ostensible, cause of her coming to London.

For every rustic admirer she had a dozen in her new home ; but there was an indescribable something in her face that kept them at a distance. They came, worshipped, and went away, one and all treating her with the courtesy which is the natural tribute paid to the true gentlewoman. Imagine, then, her indignation and dismay one afternoon in the early summer, after she had been nearly a year in London, on seeing the bleared eyes of her persecutor blinking at her across the counter.

She found it impossible to avoid his importunities ; to return home was useless ; nor was it easy to find another refuge at a moment's notice. The state of things had

been for some time unbearable, when it was suddenly brought to a climax.

Her lover had surprised her alone one evening in the shop, and was on the point of taking by force what he despaired of winning by persuasion, when Spinks appeared in the doorway of the saloon. Instinctively she appealed



to her employer for protection, and Spinks, with an alacrity and a display of muscle which he afterwards confessed surprised himself, seized his lordship by the collar, dragged him to the street-door, and precipitated him into the gutter. The physical exertion alone might have made the barber's heart beat; but when Mary, her hair in beautiful disorder, with tears in her eyes, and conscious

blushes on her cheeks, told him the story of her tormentor, the tremor of her hand in his suddenly revealed to him the true cause of his heart's agitation.

“Happy the wooing that's not long a-doing.”

Before the summer was gone the wedding bells were pealing, and the following May our hero stepped upon the scene.

We need not, however, trace the Spinks family to its original source for the purposes of our story. It may be taken for granted that the pedigree of Joey Spinks, our hero, though unrecorded, is as long as any man's. Suffice it to say that, after six years of matrimonial bliss, the elder Spinks was gathered to his fathers, leaving behind him a disconsolate widow and a princely fortune. The business was sold, and Mrs. Spinks retired with her only child to a villa she purchased at Roehampton. Here in the green meadows, amidst her herd of soft-eyed Alderneys, her heart went back to the scenes of her girlhood. Once again, but now in rustling petticoats, she stepped between the rows of brimming pails in her dairy, and taught the astonished dairy-maid to churn. She did not care to go much into society ; she preferred to know a few people and to know those well. Her life was centred in her boy.

“Of him

By night she dreamed, and thought the livelong day.”

So month after month slipped by, and Joey was old enough to go to school ; but his mother's heart went from her at the thought of being separated from her darling. “Princes don't go to school,” she argued with herself, “they have tutors ; Joey shall have a tutor and be taught at home.” Her choice in this matter fell upon a Mr. Price, who, though a scholar and a gentleman, was, unfortunately for Joey's education, quite unfitted for the charge he undertook. He would sit for hours before the fire-place with his feet on the fender and his thoughts in

the moon, oblivious of such sublunary matters as Joey and his books, while his pupil was watching the thrush hopping across the lawn in search of tiny tips of worms, or the wagtail darting with unerring aim upon his little prey. If a cat appeared among the laurels and Joey rushed out calling on his dogs, the student perchance would start



from his reverie, recall and admonish the truant and resume the task, but before long he was back again in the moon, and Joey was left once more to his own devices. As far as his pupil's education was concerned, the result of Mr. Price's erudition was purely negative—Joey learned no harm ; but it is possible that he may yet produce

something that will astonish the literary world and remove the reproach of sterility.



Joey's favourite and chief companion was the coachman. George Bullock began life in a racing stable at Newmarket; from there he went into Lord Bulstrode's

hunting establishment, where he was eventually promoted to be his lordship's second horseman; but in course of time, having grown too heavy for his place, he took a situation as coachman in London, and from there entered the service of Mrs. Spinks. He soon gained the confidence of his mistress and the affection of his young master. He found no difficulty in teaching the latter to ride, for good hands and a good seat seemed to come to him by nature. There was not a ditch in Richmond Park or on Wimbledon Common that was not negotiated by Joey and his pony, who came at length to despise the miniature leaping bar set up at the bottom of the meadow which contained the Alderneys.

Bullock's conversation was of little else besides horses and hunting, and, being a good word-painter, it is not to be wondered at that his youthful listener gradually imbibed the enthusiasm of the ex-second horseman for his favourite sport. One of Joey's greatest delights was to visit the Royal Paddocks at Hampton Court, and, had he only studied his books with half the avidity with which he imbibed the instruction of Bullock and the stud groom, he might soon have rivalled Mr. Price himself in a knowledge of the classics.

As Joey grew older, his sphere of activity increased. The pony was succeeded by a fifteen hand thorough-bred, and the boy came to be well known with "the Queen's" and with the packs of foxhounds that came within reach. While he was still in his teens, he and his bulky companion were familiar figures at Tattersall's, and were often to be seen competing with lords and dukes for lightweight hunters in the sale-yard.

CHAPTER II.

IT was Derby-day, and the twenty-first anniversary of Joey's birth—an eventful epoch, for not only on that day did he come into legal possession of the bulk of his father's fortune, but, it so happened, he was unexpectedly brought face to face with the opportunity of extracting from the same the fullest possible enjoyment — what seemed to him the *summum bonum*—of human existence.

On the morning of this auspicious day Joey was standing on the steps before the hall-door, between his mother and a gentleman, whose costume, manners, and general appearance were the envy and admiration of a select few, who, like our hero, aspired to distinction in things equestrian.

Captain Crichton—that was the name this gentleman was generally known by—had made Joey's acquaintance at Tattersall's. He was Joey's senior by some years, tall, thin, though not slight, fair and not bad-looking. He wore a moustache, whose weight seemed to account for the heaviness of his eyelids ; and he had, either by nature or affectation, a voice and manner as languid—and in Joey's eyes as aristocratic—as it is possible to conceive. During a chequered career he had had a considerable experience of the ways of men and horses, by which he was enabled to assume a superiority readily yielded by a certain number of embryo sportsmen, who were proud to call themselves his friends.

Mrs. Spinks had, a few days before, availed herself of Captain Crichton's experience, and commissioned him to get her birthday present for her boy; and the three were now critically examining what was undoubtedly the smartest "turn-out" south of the Thames.

"Give him one more turn round," said Joey; and Bullock, with becoming solemnity, put the cob through



his paces in the somewhat narrow space confined by the house on one side and by the rhododendrons on the other.

Horse and trap were beyond criticism, and Joey and his mother vied with one another in expressing their gratitude to the Captain, who, with languid modesty, and more truth than either of them suspected, repeatedly assured them the obligation was on his side.

Bullock, having completed the circle, descended from his seat, and Joey, taking the reins, mounted to his place ; his friend got up on the other side. Bullock, by the help of the luncheon-basket, with more agility and less disturbance of the dog-cart's equilibrium than one might have expected, seeing that his girth almost visibly increased with his daily visits to the creamery, climbed on to the back seat, Mrs. Spinks waved her hand, and the dog-cart swept through the gateway on the road to Epsom.

There had been a slight frost over night, which had vanished beneath the beams of the sun like a thief before the policeman's lantern, and now nature seemed to be rejoicing at her escape from the clutches of her burglarious foe. Birds were singing, buds were bursting, lambs were bleating, human voices sounding merrily along the road, while Joey, in the exuberance of his spirits, chirruped to his horse as joyfully as the robin converses with his mate. His companion—the one thing imperturbable amidst his animated surroundings—seemed even to enhance the feeling of general content.

It was Joey's first Derby, for his mother, though she encouraged his love of hunting and all other manly sports, dreaded, perhaps not unwisely, that her boy, whose innocence had been her chiefest care, should be exposed to the perils of the Turf. As she watched him drive away in the vehicle she herself had provided to carry him into temptation, her heart misgave her, and she wondered if Captain Crichton were the best companion for her darling.

Joey had indulged what he considered his mother's whim so far that he had never attended a race-meeting, but his conscience had not extended her prohibition to racing in the abstract ; and such was the assiduity with which he studied Ruff's Guide and the newspaper reports

that many a man who has been in every stand and paddock in Great Britain might be envious of Joey's racing knowledge. There was scarcely a horse in the Stud-Book but Joey could tell you his pedigree off-hand; the performances of last year's two-year-olds were at his finger-ends; and any blank spaces in the mental picture that he had drawn from sporting literature of the scene he was now about to witness for the first time his glowing imagination had filled in with the liveliest tints.

Many a time he had ridden over the Downs after the Derby week; and traced the history of the race upon the classic ground; and, as an antiquary in some future age may endeavour to gauge the population of London by the number of bricks strewn upon the site of that once mighty city, he used to try to form an idea of the vastness of the Derby crowd by the innumerable bits of paper and broken glass scattered far and wide along the course. He had been looking forward to the day of his emancipation, and was now experiencing the sense of pride, responsibility and independence felt by the new-made monitor at a public school, or by the eaglet on taking his first flight from his parent's nest.

"Mind where you're a-driving of, young man," cried a costermonger, whose donkey had stuck up in the middle of the road, and was blocking the thoroughfare, "you'll take all the paint off my wheel."

"You mind your donkey doesn't run away with you," Joey retorted, as that animal, by a sudden aberration of intellect, seemed as anxious to get forward as he had been a moment before to stand still.

"If you take my advice, Mr. Curleyvig," the coster shouted, as Joey rattled past him, "you won't give that young man vat is sitting behind nothing out of that basket, or your new springs vill break before you gets home!"

"He gets nothing but grass," shouted Joey, in return, and drove on, laughing heartily at his own joke, while Bullock, resenting the allusion to the size of his waist, looked all the unutterable things at the grinning coster that he dared not express.

All sorts and conditions of men and women, in every kind of conveyance, on two wheels or four, hurrying to one spot for one purpose, singing, shouting, laughing, chaffing, getting as good or better than they gave in the gayest humour and good-fellowship, thronged the road. While the captain treated the sallies he provoked with consummate indifference, Joey had a cheery repartee for the gipsy and the tramp. For that day, at any rate, they were his equals. The love of sport was the touch of Nature that made the whole world kin.



CHAPTER III.

THE Paddock was full. The Derby was the next race. Knots of people gathered here and there round the horses, which were being stripped. Joey had hurried from one to the other, admiring this horse, finding fault with that, and was standing looking at a bay colt who found but few admirers.

Among the few who were watching the final touches being put upon this colt was a man about thirty years of age. He was tall, dark, slight, extremely handsome, and dressed like a gentleman.

"Hulloa! Crichton," he exclaimed, catching sight of his friend as he turned round, "How are you? It's a long time since I've seen you. What are you doing on this race? Done any business lately?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied Crichton, loud enough for Joey to hear; "I won a pony on the last race, but more by good luck than anything else; but let me introduce you to my friend Spinks—Mr. Joseph Spinks—Lord Unwin."

Joey and Lord Unwin shook hands, and renewed their examination of the colt.

"A nice little horse, I like him immensely," said Joey.

"Ye-es," drawled Crichton, "he's a nice little horse, and shows quality, but hasn't the size or stamina to make a Derby-winner; and he's not trained fine enough."

"His trainer is probably the best judge of that," said

Joey, at once proceeding to enumerate a number of small horses which had won big races. He then recounted the colt's engagements as a two-year-old, explained how he came to get beaten the only time he ran, and went on to argue that horses were more often over-galloped than under-trained. "I've known," he said, "eight men training for a boat-race, all forced to take exactly the same amount of exercise, the ten-stone man as lean as a herring, and the fourteen-stone——"

"My dear Spinks," said Crichton, interrupting, "wait till you've seen a few more horses in training, and you will know more about it."

"Well," said Joey, still unconvinced, "you may be right, but there's something wonderfully taking about him; he looks the picture of health."

Crichton winked at Lord Unwin behind Joey's back, and, taking out his betting-book as he spoke, said, "I'll lay twenty-five to one against him if any one cares to take it."

"Done!" said his lordship, almost before the words were out of his friend's mouth; and they exchanged a look of mutual understanding.

"Hundreds, I suppose," Crichton said carelessly, and Lord Unwin nodded.

The colt was on the move again, so Joey and his two companions continued their tour of inspection.

"There's bad news from my part of the world," said Lord Unwin. "Have you heard that Johnson is leaving the country, and giving up the hounds?"

"That's a bad business," said Crichton; "who's going to take them?"

"I wish I knew some one who would take them," replied his lordship. "You see everyone is so hard up, and the country is so infernally"—he was going to say "unpopular," but was stopped by the sudden impact of

Crichton's elbow under his fifth rib, and on looking up saw an almost imperceptible glance of intelligence in his friend's eye.

"The horses are going out," exclaimed Joey. "Come along or we shall be late!" and he started off and pushed his way through the paddock entrance, fully believing his two friends were at his heels.

"That isn't a bet," was Crichton's first remark when Joey was out of hearing.

"Of course not, my dear chap, I understand that; but who's your friend?"

"Our friend," said Crichton, with a laugh, "is the new Master of the Bosby Hounds."

Lord Unwin was evidently puzzled, and, with his eyebrows raised slightly, looked at his companion as if asking if he were in earnest. The mute enquiry was answered by a nod. Presently a light broke in upon his noble mind, and his brow relaxed. "Money?" he asked.

"Pots," was the laconic reply.

"Father?"

"No. Mother."

"Trustees?"

"None."

"He's too young," said Lord Unwin after a short silence.

"He's big enough, anyhow, and rich enough," said Crichton. "The younger the better for us."

"What's the mother like?"

"The devil."

"What, ugly?"

"No, sharp."

"Do you think you can manage her?"

"If you can work the committee."

Dogs, or men, who are accustomed to hunt in couples soon come to understand one another, and the two friends

made such rapid progress with their scheme that it was cut and almost dried by the time they rejoined Joey on the hill.

The horse had been taken out of the dogcart, and Joey was standing on the front seat watching the horses through his glasses as they went down to the post. "Bullock, he's the best mover of the lot!" he cried, with enthusiasm, and seeing Crichton added, "I advise you to hedge, Crichton."

"Thanks old chap, I don't think I shall come to much harm—but come down, Unwin wants us to go to his drag. He drove over with an old Yankee named Bond, and a lovely daughter. There's lots of room, and you will see the race far better than from here. Come along, your trap will be all right if Bullock only takes half the care of it he takes of himself."

Bullock, who was busily engaged at the back of the dogcart accounting for the remains of the luncheon, and who instinctively regarded "the Capting" as an enemy, was restrained from retorting by a large mouthful of *foie-gras*, and could only mutter something about taking care of something or other, as Joey descended and followed his two friends through the maze of carriages.

Mr. Bond was a commanding figure as he stood beside his daughter on the box-seat of his coach. He wore his iron-grey hair rather long and brushed back from his forehead, and a goatee beard, and had in a marked degree the high cheekbones and prominent features characteristic of his race. His grey eye had that expression which seems to come from pride of birth and long command of men. His sixty years sat lightly on his upright frame. Miss Bond smiled as Lord Unwin apologised to her for the liberty he had taken in asking for standing room for his two friends, and assured him that she and her father were delighted to see them.

"May they come up, sir," Lord Unwin asked of Mr. Bond.

"Come up? my dear Unwin; of course they may. Captain Crichton, proud to make your acquaintance. Get up here, sir, behind me, you couldn't have a better place. Mr. Spinks, you're welcome; all good sportsmen are welcome here. Jessie make room for Mr. Spinks beside you. My daughter, Mr. Spinks. Unwin look after your friends; you know where to find anything you want. What a scene! Superb! We have nothing to equal this in our country, but we have the same blood in us, the same love of sport and of fair play."

"They are off!" shouted Joey, who had forgotten the fair American, and breathless with excitement, was trying all he could to keep his glasses fixed on 'the field.' The bell rings, and a myriad voices drop, as it were, to a whisper. Then a murmur rises in the distance, at first like that of a swarm of bees, but growing louder as it comes nearer, and swelling into the roar of "here they come!" Joey can distinguish the colours as they swing round Tattenham Corner.

"They are all together," he exclaims, "my horse is next to the rails; there's one beaten, can't tell which it is, and another. There are only five in it; the favourite wins. No, my horse is holding him!"

The jockeys pick up their whips. The favourite! the favourite wins! There is only one horse near him. It is Joey's outsider, and he is coming up. They are within twenty yards of the post; the jockeys are riding all they know, neck and neck, stride for stride, and amid a terrific uproar they pass the post. The shout of triumph from "the ring" anticipates the hoisting of the outsider's number.

CHAPTER IV.

"MY horse has won ! my horse has won !" cried the excited Joey, "I said he would, didn't I, Crichton ?" Then, remembering his friend's heavy wager, added quickly, "But, by Jove, I'm awfully sorry, I'm afraid you have dropped a lot of money."

"Only a trifle," drawled Crichton, with more imperturbability than usual, "my book was pretty well made. I might say I missed winning something considerable ; but I must congratulate you, my dear Spinks, on your extraordinary good judgment, and ask you to accept my apologies. I assure you, sir," he went on, turning to Mr. Bond, "Spinks is a wonderful judge of a horse, I shan't be a bit surprised to see him carrying off the blue ribbon himself one of these days."

Crichton's equanimity under such crushing misfortune, his handsome apology and generous tribute to his friend, had their designed effect upon Mr. Bond and his daughter, and raised Joey's opinion of him higher than ever. Such praise in the presence of such beauty ! Did Jonathan ever do as much for David, Damon for Pythias, or any other hero of antiquity for his bosom friend ?

There was little chance of conversation lagging in the presence of Miss Jessie Bond. Her capacity for enjoyment and superabundant spirit and vivacity seemed to be contagious ; even the Captain relaxed his habit of indifference beneath her spell. She was devoted to all animals, she told Joey. They had lots of horses in

America, but her father did not bring any with him to Spetchley—that was the name of the place he had rented at Bosby—but he was going to buy some before the winter, as she had set her heart upon hunting. Mr. Johnson, however, was giving up the hounds, and there seemed, unfortunately, some difficulty about getting a new master. It would be a terrible pity if no one could be found to keep them on. She wanted her father to take them, but he said he knew nothing about the business. She guessed he would soon learn if he put his mind to it.

The young lady had come across a sympathetic spirit in Joey, whose tongue fairly ran away with him when they got upon the subject of horses and hunting. She was amused at first by the enthusiasm with which he rode his hobby, but soon became genuinely interested in the vivid descriptions of his favourite sport, which, flattered and encouraged by the attentive attitude of his beautiful pupil, Joey delivered with all the confidence of a professor lecturing upon his particular branch of the arts.

Meanwhile the other occupants of the coach were discussing the prospects of the Bosby Hunt, and the two younger men were cautiously advancing their design by enlarging on their friend's prowess in the hunting-field, in the hope of finding an opening to suggest him as a possible successor to Mr. Johnson.

Some of my readers will, perhaps, confess to having experienced a sense of relief when some horseman, more enterprising or better mounted than themselves, has opportunely made a hole in a dangerous-looking fence, and may remember with what alacrity they availed themselves of their unexpected good fortune. They can imagine, then, with what feelings the Captain and his confederate overheard Miss Bond make the following remark: "Oh, Mr. Spinks, why don't *you* take the hounds? It would be perfectly lovely!"

In an instant Crichton rode into the gap. "By Jove, Unwin, there's the very man for you ! What do you say, Mr. Bond ?"

The gentleman thus appealed to was as yet not even a member of the hunt, although he had expressed his willingness, when called upon to do so, to give a handsome subscription towards it, and could have no possible objection to the proposal, which was accordingly carried by acclamation.

It is not easy to imagine the sensations of the crossing-sweeper who awoke one morning to find himself a millionaire, but it is doubtful if his senses were more completely scattered than Joey's were by this sudden and unexpected proposition. His colour went and came ; speech left him ; his eyes automatically reflected the close finish of another race, but conveyed no impression to his brain ; the drums of his ears vibrated to the shouts around him, but he heard nothing ; his soul was transported as if by the spell of a Mahatma into a visionary future, or, like that of an Indian chief, had departed to the happy hunting grounds reserved for the spirits of the blest. On returning to a state of semi-consciousness, he heard Lord Unwin saying : "If I may make use of your name, Mr. Bond, I venture to promise the committee will adopt my suggestion. Our chief anxiety will be to get Mr. Spinks to give his consent."

Joey felt it was necessary for him to speak, and stammered something about the great honour conferred upon him, his willingness to accede to the proposal as far as his personal wishes were concerned, and the necessity of consulting his mother before coming to any final decision.

Miss Bond, who, with feminine tact, understood the embarrassment of which her father was perfectly unconscious, hereupon proposed that they should all go in a body to the Paddock. There, once more among the

horses, Joey soon recovered his self-possession, and it was not long before he admitted his sympathetic companion to his fullest confidence. By the time they were ready to return to the coach she knew all about his mother and his money, Bullock and his horses, his past experiences and his hopes for the future.



On the way back to "the hill" she expressed a wish to see his mothers' birthday present, and they bent their steps to the spot where the faithful Bullock had been left in charge.

"Of course," explained Joey, "you won't see the cob, but you will see the dog-cart and Bullock."

The cart was there, but Bullock was nowhere to be seen. In his place was a small boy leisurely licking the sauce from a dish that had lately contained a lobster salad—who, on Joey's approach, hastily decamped without giving the desired information as to Bullock's whereabouts. A stir of excitement in the crowd not far off attracted their attention, and there the truant was dis-

covered in a state of frantic rage and profuse perspiration, jumping on the remnants of a three-legged stool, and an emblazoned banner that had formed the sole stock-in-trade of a departed welsher.

"He's got my money," screamed Bullock, on catching sight of his master, "the scoundrel's got my money! I backed your horse, Mr. Joseph, and put my winnings on the last race, and when he saw me coming he hooked it!" and seizing the banner the disappointed gambler tore it into shreds.

"Never mind the money," said Joey, ready to sink into the earth after all he had told Miss Bond about his "perfect treasure." "Go and get the cob: I'm going home."

"Well, if you will not be persuaded to stay," said Miss Bond, holding out her hand to Joey, "I must say good-bye, and many thanks for your lessons in fox-hunting; you will see that I shall profit by them. Mind you come and see us if you are in town; at any rate I expect we shall meet before long at Bosby." Thus saying, she bowed to Captain Crichton and followed Lord Unwin and her father to the coach.

"By George," Crichton exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing, "that brute Bullock! It's too bad that you should be punished for his beastly stupidity!"

"How do you mean?" asked Joey.

"If you can't see how, there's no use my telling you. What do you suppose Lord Unwin will think of you? Do you think he will propose you as a candidate for the mastership of a hunt like the 'Bosby' after what he has just seen? 'Like master like man' is the way the world judges of these things. If your servant behaves like that, how are you likely to manage a hunt? Old Bond is no fool; he won't have anything to do with the business, when he sees your man-servant treats you like a child, and without the slightest respect—before Miss Bond too!

By George, Spinks, you must get rid of him, you really must, that is if you want to be a master of hounds."

"But I don't see," Joey began to plead.

"Of course you don't," Crichton said sharply, with crushing effrontery; "but if you had been accustomed to any other society than Bullock's you would be able to—but here he comes; let him see that this kind of thing is not to be tolerated."

Bullock came up leading the cob. "If I had thought, Mr. Joseph—" he began, but his intended apology was cut short with "Put him in and hold your tongue; I don't intend to have any more of your impudence!"

Bullock cast a reproachful glance, like an ill-used dog, at his master, and proceeded to back the cob between the shafts.

They drove home in silence. What a change from the morning! No fun, no laughter, no chirruping, but sad hearts and long faces! Crichton, never very communicative at any time, had every reason to be satisfied with his day's work, and, not seeing how he could improve matters by saying anything, was content to remain silent. The mercury in Joey's tubes had fallen to zero, the glory of the day had departed and the brilliant prospect that but an hour ago had stretched unbroken to the horizon was now wrapped in the blackest clouds. The unhappy cause of this depression sat behind, brooding over his own sorrow. His pecuniary loss was forgotten; it was the words "no more of his impudence" that swelled within his breast. He loved the boy as his own son; he could have died for him; and now, where he might have expected sympathy he got "no more of his impudence." He knew his enemy "the Capting" was at the bottom of it, and but for his presence would have opened his grief to his young master, and there and then effected a reconciliation.

CHAPTER V.

ONE morning, at the end of the week following the events related in our last chapter, Mrs. Spinks and Crichton were walking together in the garden at Roehampton. "I cannot understand," the latter was saying, "what objection you can have to Lord Unwin, or why your objection to him should prevent your son accepting the mastership. The offer comes from the committee, and, although he is one of the committee, you are certainly under no obligation to him. The obligation is quite the other way. It is no easy matter to find anyone who is willing to hunt the Bosby country. Whoever does it must have the money to spend, and those who have the money prefer a country with a more fashionable and a better sporting reputation. The expenses of a crack hunting establishment in the shires are much greater, and the management requires more experience than your son has had. He would be sure to get into difficulties if he attempted such a thing, whereas with the Bosby all this is reduced to a minimum; he will step straight into Mr. Johnson's shoes, and the thing will manage itself. He will have employment to keep him out of mischief, which—you will forgive me for saying it—is most important at his age; the expense will be very moderate, his position in county society will be assured, and, above all, he will gain experience that will be invaluable to him in after life; and, if my assistance is worth anything, I shall be only too happy to place my services at his disposal until he feels strong enough to be quite independent."

"All your arguments, Captain Crichton—and I allow they are good ones—do not alter my opinion of Lord Unwin. It will be impossible to avoid him if we go to Bosby, and my aversion to him is so great that I absolutely refuse to bring my son in any way under his influence."

"Under his influence! Excuse me, my dear Mrs. Spinks, I have no intention of being rude, but you argue like a woman. You dislike a man whom you have never even seen, and against whom you can bring no specific charge, and then refuse to bring your son under his influence when there is no possibility or question of his coming under his influence at all. Lord Unwin is a friend of mine, and a gentleman, and I assure you if there were anything against his character I should be aware of it. You must, of course, make some allowance for the temptations a man in his position, and as good-looking as he is, is exposed to. He has not much of this world's goods, true; but poverty, even in a lord, is not a crime, and I am sure you would be the last person in the world to judge a man by the length of his purse. As for his influence, he has no control whatever over the management of the hunt, and I am quite sure that the slightest hint that any attentions on his part would be unacceptable will be sufficient to keep him away. If you would prefer it—I don't wish to force my services upon you—I will give him to understand that you would rather he did not even call upon you. There need be no disagreeables, and, if necessary, some harmless excuse can be invented to account for your not knowing one another."

"You are very kind," replied the lady, weighing the possibilities of his last suggestion, "but there is no need to invent anything; if without giving offence you can let Lord Unwin know that——"

"Of course I can," Crichton eagerly interposed; "if you will leave it to my discretion, you need not have the slightest cause for uneasiness. I am really delighted that you have given your consent, and must hasten to tell Joey of my success. Will you excuse me for dinner to-night," he added, as he turned to go; "I have an appointment in town, and am afraid my business may detain me up to a late hour."

Joey, who had been watching them from the house, felt like a prisoner awaiting the verdict of the jury. On hearing the result of the prolonged interview, he was profuse in the expression of his gratitude, considering it a proof—if further proof were needed—of Crichton's disinterested friendship.

The moment Crichton left her Mrs. Spinks regretted having given her consent. She turned to recall him, but he had already reached the house. She disliked Lord Unwin, and mistrusted Crichton. His arguments were specious, his words smooth, his face inscrutable, but his motives, she feared, were self-interested, though she knew not how they could be so. She passed up and down the gravel walk, trying to analyze her feelings and bring them to the test of reason. The struggle lay between her wishes and her fears; she wished to gratify her boy, she feared to bring him into trouble—what trouble? Her fears were vague, her wishes were strong, and by degrees the latter prevailed. Her heart grew lighter, and the joy that beamed from Joey's eyes as he thanked her removed any foreboding that still lingered in her mind.

That afternoon Joey posted a letter to the committee of the Bosby Hunt, saying that, provided he liked the country after he had seen it (and he had very little doubt on that point), he was willing to agree to their terms and accept the mastership.

On his return after posting the letter—for he would not

trust it to other hands—he found Bullock in the stable-yard. The welsher episode had long passed from Joey's recollection ; but Bullock, constantly irritated and goaded by the sight of Crichton, who had been staying in the house ever since that unfortunate occurrence, still had the sense of injured innocence rankling in his breast. Consequently, Joey's exultation as he announced the all-important fact that he had posted the letter evoked no response from his injured and faithful servant. He looked in vain for the congratulations he expected, tried again and again to coax him into good humour by dilating on the prospects of the coming winter, and at last, little suspecting the cause of Bullock's trouble, fanned the smouldering spark into a flame by declaring that he was indebted for his good fortune to Captain Crichton. "It was the last straw that gave the camel the hump," as Mrs. Malaprop might have said, and this praise of his arch-enemy was too much for the already over loaded Bullock. "The Capting," he shouted, flinging down a carriage lamp that he was carrying. "I say d—n the Capting!" with which he rushed into the harness-room and banged the door.

Joey's first thought was that it was meant for a joke, but his common sense told him that Bullock was incapable of such a consummate piece of acting. He then wondered if he were drunk, but soon came to the conclusion that that also was impossible. Finally, incensed and pained as he was by such unwarrantable behaviour on the part of his old and valued friend, he nevertheless believed that there must be some rational explanation of his conduct, and, determined to find out what it was, tried to open the door of the harness-room; but the key was turned in the lock, and his attempts to force an entrance were answered by a sullen roar from within, in which the only articulate sound was the "Capting." After some

minutes spent in fruitless knocking and entreaty Joey returned to the house, persuaded that Crichton was right, his mother had spoilt Bullock—with the best intentions, no doubt—but the time had come to assert his authority. It was his attempt to do this that had upset Bullock ; such a state of things must not be allowed to continue ; unless Bullock apologised and reformed he must go.



It was ten o'clock before Crichton returned from town. Mrs. Spinks had left the drawing-room, so he and Joey retired to the smoking-room to discuss the necessary preparations for taking over the hounds. Crichton sank into an armchair, lit one of his host's cigars, crossed his legs, and with half-closed eyes watched the fragrant rings that floated above his head.

"I've written the letter," Joey began.

"That's right, my dear Spinks ; I congratulate you."

"But," Joey went on, "I have told the committee I will not decide finally till I have seen the country."

"What the deuce—pardon me—but what in the world is the good of your seeing the country? You had much better take Unwin's word for it, you will only expose your ignorance and your youth by going down there."

"I can't help that," Joey insisted, "only an idiot would undertake to hunt a country he had never seen. There is no doubt about its being satisfactory, for in my present state of mind I should be pleased with anything. If you would go with me——"

"Of course I shall be delighted, my dear fellow, when I have time. The only serious objection is to your going down alone; but I don't want you to let them slip through your fingers. It would have been better to accept the offer at once, and we could have gone down any time later on and had a look round. But, by-the-by, I did a good stroke of business this afternoon. I went to see Unwin, and whilst I was with him who should come in but Lord Bulstrode's stud-groom. He came to tell Unwin that he is leaving his present place, and would like to get a good situation. I at once thought of you. He is a first-rate man, and is sure to be snatched up at once. Of course I couldn't engage him positively without consulting you; as it is, I am afraid I have taken too much upon myself, for I told him to come and see you to-morrow morning at nine o'clock."

"It is awfully kind of you, Crichton, and I don't want you to think for one moment that I am offended; but I had quite intended to make Bullock my stud-groom. You see, he has been with us a great many years, I could hardly turn him away, and he knows all about hunting."

Crichton opened his eyes and stared at Joey in a manner that made him feel rather small and extremely uncomfortable.

"Knows all about hunting, my dear boy! Where did he acquire this wonderful knowledge?"

"He was with Lord Bulstrode," said Joey, thinking he had scored one.

"In what capacity, pray?" Crichton asked, in a tone of amused mockery.

"As second horseman," Joey replied, feeling that the tables were again turned.

A shrug of the shoulders was deemed a sufficient answer, and they relapsed into silence.

"I know poor old Bullock has his faults," Joey presently began, "but my mother would never consent to part with him. He has his faults," he repeated, and hesitated before he went on again; "he was confoundedly rude to me this afternoon."

He then related what had occurred while Crichton was away, without saying that the mentioning of Crichton's name was the original cause of the incident. When he had finished his story Crichton said, "I cannot say more than I have said already. If you take my advice you will let him go; but if your mother absolutely refuses to part with him, why couldn't he remain as her servant without having anything to do with your part of the establishment?"

This seemed a happy compromise, and Joey retired to rest confident that he had found a solution of the difficulty.

Punctually at nine o'clock the following morning, Mr. Dawkins was shown into Joey's business room. He was a small hard-bitten bit of stuff, quietly dressed, respectful in his manner, quick and intelligent. He answered all Joey's questions in a straightforward way. "How old are you?" "Forty-two." "How long have you been with Lord Bulstrode?" "I went there as a lad of sixteen. His lordship always had the best 'osses that money could buy," he said, in answer to the Captain, "and there was never one missed his turn the whole time I had charge of them; of course there was accidents—I don't count them."

"Why are you leaving?" was Joey's next question.

"Well, you see, sir, I wanted to be with a younger gentleman ; his lordship don't ride like he used, and is reducing his stud, and the 'osses he has now are not quite what I've been accustomed to. I thought I should like, sir, to be with a gentleman that is a really good horseman and means business."

Joey paused, thinking what he should ask next.

"I don't think," said Crichton, "there is anything more you want to know."

"No, perhaps not. Of course Lord Bulstrode will give him a character ?"

"If you think it's necessary, but Unwin is Bulstrode's nephew, and knows all about him."

Here Dawkins interposed, "You will excuse me, sir, but as I said to Lord Unwin last night, his lordship has always been a good friend to me, and I should like to act fair by him and by you too, sir ; but I got this letter this morning" (and he drew an envelope from his breast pocket), "engaging me if I would accept ; but, as I said, I won't go back on my word to his lordship, and have come down here to give you the first refusal."

"What wages are you asking ?"

"I've been getting a hundred a year, sir, besides extras, and considering my long experience I might look to better myself ; but as you seem to be the sort of gentleman I am looking for, I won't say nothing more about that."

As Joey seemed to hesitate about accepting these terms, Crichton said, "My dear Spinks, if you will have a Rembrandt you must pay for it !" to which remark Dawkins added, "Them old masters, I believe, are very expensive."

"Yes," said Joey, "but I'm not sure I can afford to indulge in such luxuries."

"We are all agreed," said Crichton, "that you cannot run a hunt for nothing. Economise in trifles if you like, but, believe me, a good stud-groom is by far the most economical in the long run."

This argument being obviously a sound one, Joey agreed to the terms without further discussion, and asked Dawkins if he had a wife and family.

"No sir; you see I don't think a man like me ought to marry. 'Osses require a man's individed attention, morning, noon and night. Now, of course, a man is bound to pay his wife some little attention, as the saying is, and what he gives to his wife he must take away from his 'osses."



Joey could not help comparing this picture of a paragon with that of the fat Bullock lounging in the creamery.

"Very well," he said, "I shall be glad to engage you. You will hear from me shortly when you are to go to Bosby. I think I shall be able to take the lease of

Bosby Hall. If so, you will find every accommodation for yourself and the horses. Good morning."

Bullock caught sight of Dawkins as the latter made his exit through the back gate, and watched him as he went down the road. The figure was familiar—"Dawkins!" he exclaimed, as its identity recurred to him—"the devil! George, old man, there's bad times in store for you."

CHAPTER VI.

ON the third day after Joey had despatched his letter to the Committee, the morning post brought a letter of thanks from them, and another from Mr. Johnson, inviting him to Bosby to see the kennels. Mr. Johnson regretted that he was obliged to leave home for good at the end of the week, but hoped that Joey would be able to come down the next day, or the day after at the latest. In case this were not convenient, and he preferred to come down later on, he begged he would use the house and servants as if they were his own. "If," the letter went on, "you would like to take the lease of Bosby Hall, I shall be delighted to meet your wishes in any way I can. My agent, Mr. Brain, will furnish you with all particulars. As I hear from Mr. Bond that you are a good sportsman and a keen fox-hunter, I feel confident that the kennels, the hounds, and Peters, my old huntsman, will meet with your approval. They are old-fashioned, perhaps, according to modern lights—'old-fashioned but not antique,' as the furniture dealers say. As I hope, however, to see you to-morrow or next day, I will say no more about them at present."

Most unfortunately, Crichton was engaged; his business was of paramount importance, and it was quite impossible for him to leave town.

Joey, remembering what Crichton had said about his exposing his ignorance, was afraid to go down by himself.

He had no idea what sort of man Mr. Johnson was. It was, after all, not imperative that they should meet ; much could be done through his agent, the rest by letter. So he decided to wait till the following Monday, when Crichton would be disengaged, and wrote to Mr. Johnson regretting he could not manage to go that week. "I feel sure," he wrote, "that I shall find the kennels, the hounds, and Peters all you describe them when I see them on Monday, and I hope to arrange with Mr. Brain for the lease of Bosby Hall."

About noon, on the day appointed, Joey and Crichton found themselves on the platform of the railway station nearest to the village of Bosby. As they emerged from the booking office they were accosted by a queer-looking man in a shabby station-cart, with a broken down old hunter between the shafts. With one eye on Crichton and the other somewhere on the roof of the station, this individual touched his cat-skin cap and ejaculated "Spinks ?"

"Is this Mr. Johnson's carriage ?" Joey asked.

The eye that had rested on Crichton was turned on to Joey, the other towards the sun, at which it watered and blinked, and their owner said "cart."

"I am Mr. Spinks," said Joey.

As this was an observation that did not require a verbal answer, the driver indicated by a sign that they had better get up, and, pointing to the horse, said "stumbles," which apparently meant that he was going to drive, and that either Joey or his friend would have to take the back seat. This led to an altercation, the end of which was that Joey, in his capacity of M.F.H., took his place beside the coachman, while Crichton hooked his arm over the back-rest.

"Kennels ?" said the coachman, in a tone of enquiry. Joey, unable to determine by the direction of the eye for whom the question was intended, looked at his friend, who said, "Yes, drive to the kennels."

"How far is it?" asked Joey, as they were jolting slowly along the badly kept road.

"Five and a half."

"Are they near the Hall?"

"Quarter."

"Mr. Johnson is not at home, I suppose?"

A jerk of the driver's head away from the sun implied that the gentleman in question had gone north.

"Is this the carriage Mr. Johnson generally sends to meet his guests?" said Crichton.

"Horses—carriages—coachman—" and a jerk of the head northwards after each word explained that the articles mentioned had either preceded or followed their owner.

Amused by the conciseness of the fellow's answers, which were sufficient for all practical purposes, and, moreover, without a suspicion of incivility, Joey proceeded to catechise him more closely on points relating to the hunt.

"Are there plenty of foxes about?"

"If you can find 'em."

"Can Peters find them?"

"Find anything—from a flea to a helephant."

"Can he ride?"

"He won't walk."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Rum 'un."

"What do you mean by a rum 'un?"

"Temper."

"How old is he?"

"Nobody knows," and the man chuckled internally without moving a muscle of his face.

"Mr. Johnson's a very kind man, isn't he?"

Now Sam, for such was the only name by which the kennel-feeder was known, was one of a class, of which

the ordinary London "cabby" is a good specimen, who seem to think a waste of words is a criminal expenditure of the breath of life. They appear almost to believe that they are predestined to utter only a fixed number of words in the course of their existence, and that every word spoken hastens the approaching end. But all of us, even the most taciturn and phlegmatic, have some weak spot in our armour through which a chance arrow may let loose a flood of eloquence. When this happens we are said to be riding our hobby, and Joey's last question seemed, as it were, to have removed some obstruction in the pipes of Sam's vocal organ, for the words which till now had fallen drop by drop, suddenly gushed forth in a tumultuous torrent.

"A kind man! I say he's a good man, as good a man as ever was. If there was more like him there would be less poverty and less sorrow. Many a time have I felt his skin,* and many's the kind word as has made me feel that life was worth living. Lor', sir, when my wife died, and it was this month eleven year ago, he might have been my brother—Come up 'os!" The old hunter had stumbled, and rushed on expecting the usual cut from the whip, but the lash didn't fall this time, and Sam went on. "But he could be hard, too, sir—no, not hard, that ain't the word—strict, he could be strict. I would rather be left in a strange kennel and no whip than do anything to bring that look into his eye. Why, they worship him almost down in the village yonder; there's old Smither, before his foot got as bad as what it is now, I've known him go half a mile out of his way just to get a nod from him as he went past.

"We had what they call a presentation before he left, and guv' him a bit of silver—it were'nt much of a thing,

* Shaken hands.

and a large dockermint in a gold frame, with all our names on it, and Peters, he tried to make a speech, and Mr. Johnson, he tried, but—come up 'os"—and this time the lash descended and Sam became silent.

Peters was standing in the road by the white gate leading to the kennels when the cart drove up. On one side of the gate lay Peter's garden—the trim patch of potatoes, the strawberry plants just coming into blossom, and the sweet-pea hedge—behind which rose his red-tiled cottage. A cat stretched itself in the sun upon the window-sill, while a canary, hidden by the creeper that clambered over the walls, was singing lustily within arm's length of her natural enemy. On the other side was a somewhat smaller cottage, and beyond could be seen the kennel and the stables.

Four or five puppies were rolling over one another in the kennel yard, and their mother's head appeared looking suspiciously at the intruders as they approached the box in which she lay.

"Mind, sir," said Peters to Joey, "I wouldn't go too near her, she's a bit jealous;" and, stooping, he gently patted his favourite's head, "What, fond of your whelps, old lady?" and her ears lay back, and her stern rapped audibly upon the straw.

"Is that one of the whips?" said Crichton, as a young man came up to take the horse from Sam.

"We've only got one, sir; that's him."

"How many hounds have you got?" asked Joey.

"Twenty-three couples, sir, in the kennel."

"You do three days a week, I suppose?" said Crichton.

"No; you can't do more than two days with one pack o' hounds, nor less than four with two—that is, not if you want to have them in any sort of condition."

"Absurd nonsense," muttered Crichton; and Peters appealed to Joey, who thought it wiser, on the whole, to plead ignorance.

As they entered the boiling-house, Joey, doing his best to hold his breath, caught sight of the puddings which were lying on the copper. "Faugh!" he exclaimed, "how they stink!"

"What of?" asked Peters.

"Horseflesh."

"Horseflesh! Why these puddings were made Friday. There's no horseflesh in *them*! You know that, surely, Mr. Spinks?"

"What confounded impertinence!" Crichton whispered in Joey's ear.

In spite of the noise made by the hounds next door, Peters overheard the words, and the temper that Sam had mentioned began to simmer.

Through the bars of the kennel-gate could be seen a bunch of dark glistening eyes and wet noses, and the short sharp bark gave place to the whine of expectation and delight as Peters approached his eager and faithful friends.

"Gaudy!" he cried, pressing back the others with his whip and allowing her to slip out, "Here, Gaudy, good bitch! There's what I call a picter," he exclaimed, turning towards his visitors, "you never saw a more perfect picter of a hound than that."

Gaudy seemed to know what was expected of her, and showed herself to the best advantage. Beautifully marked with black and tan, the keenness of her head was, perhaps, rendered more noticeable by the somewhat close rounding of her ears. Her chest was broad and deep, and her legs stood straight and strong upon the cushions of her round feet. Her drake-like neck was well set upon her body, and a slanting shoulder, rounded ribs, strong loin, and muscular thighs combined to make what was indeed a "picter of a hound."

"She is a beauty," cried Joey, more confident in his knowledge of hounds than of puddings.

"Wants quality," said Crichton.

"What quality?" Peters quickly replied; "I only wish I had as much!"

"Indeed, I wish you had," said his tormentor, with exasperating coolness; "it would be better for us all, hounds included."

Whatever differences of opinion there had been, and they were many, between Peters and Mr. Johnson, the former had always been treated with courtesy, the latter with respect. The obstinacy with which the old huntsman asserted the principles of his own hunting-religion often amused and never offended his master, who invariably, when he could, conceded the point in dispute, for he was shrewd enough to let the old man have his own way on many points of ritual, which were of very slight importance when compared with the fundamental articles on which they were entirely at one, the amicable resolution of every argument being that the Bosby hounds were for their special purpose—*i.e.*, killing foxes in a woodland country—at least as good as any that had ever been bred.

Now, Peters had taken the exact measure of Joey and his friend the moment they opened their mouths, and even before that had formed a pretty correct estimate of them from their general appearance. The flowers in their button-holes and the cut of their clothes were evil auguries in the eyes of the unaffected old sportsman.

He was accustomed to, and even courted, contradiction, for he loved an argument, and was civil to those whose opinion he respected. Joey's humility was hopeful, if disappointing; but the arrogance of his companion was more than the old man could stand.

As he put his rejected "beauty" back in the kennel, he felt for all the world like an ill-used bear who, ring in nose, is compelled, willy-nilly, to go through the usual performance. Still, as he turned to the kennel in which

the dog-hounds were kept, he could not help feeling all the confidence of a whist-player when about to play his ace of trumps upon his opponent's king.

"Here, Galloper," he cried, holding the kennel-door slightly open, while the hound, answering to his name, forced his way through the rest of the hounds.

"Here, Galloper!" and his favourite came bounding to his side.

With a gentle touch of his whip he reminded Galloper of his manners, as he seemed inclined to show his white teeth to Captain Crichton, and the dog, turning to Joey, thrust his cold nose into his hand, and insisted on the caress he was accustomed to.

"I don't like his head," said Crichton, with the air of a connoisseur.

"No more don't the foxes," retorted Peters, with ill-concealed contempt.

"His legs aren't straight."

"Not straight?" Peters shouted, thumping his crop down on the flags, and holding it upright by the hound, "you don't want 'em like lamp-posts, do you?"

"But he's throaty, and altogether too heavy," continued the critic; "he couldn't live for half a minute with the Quorn or the Pytchley."

"What I say is," said Peters, getting more and more excited, "there's more hunting in the tip of that dog's nose than in all the shires put together. Do you think I don't know?" the irascible huntsman went on; "do you think I've never been in a grass-country?"

Taking no notice of what Peters said, Crichton asked, "How's he bred?"

"By me and Mr. Johnson."

"But what is his pedigree?"

"What's the use of a pedigree if he can't hunt, or, what if he ain't got none if he can? Why, the best pack of

hounds as ever I knew had pedigrees as long as from here to Jeroosalem, all writ down in black and white, and kept in a book, and they was all sham, every one of 'em!"

"All I can say is, I could hunt a pack of hounds like that dog on a donkey."



"And so much the better," cried Peters, "if more than half the gentlemen what thinks they understands about fox-hunting 'was mounted on jackasses, there would be a good deal better sport! How can the hounds keep their heads down if the horses are always on the top of them? What with the riding, and the holloaing, and the 'What's he waiting for?' 'Why don't he cast for'ard?' 'Why don't

he cast back?' neither the hounds nor the huntsman gets a chance. They had much better stay at home, or go drag-hunting, if that's all they comes out for. Now, Mr. Spinks," he went on, turning to Joey for sympathy, "you're a young gentleman as is fond of sport, and wants to learn something about fox-hunting, but if you think you are going to kill foxes by hard riding you had far better leave it alone. I had killed more foxes before you were born than you are ever likely to see; and as for riding, there was a time when I never opened a gate. I've had my turn, and leaves that sort of thing now to somebody else. If you will take an old man's advice——'

The advice, which might have proved invaluable, was nipped in the bud by the arrival of Mr. Brain and his daughter. Mr. Brain had come over at Mr. Johnson's request to arrange with Joey about the lease of Bosby Hall, and had brought his daughter with him to do the honours at the luncheon which the housekeeper had been ordered to prepare for the visitors.

A hearty shake of the hand from Mr. Brain, and the young lady's unfeigned admiration of his beauties, in some measure restored Peter's equanimity, and averted the catastrophe that a few moments before had seemed inevitable. After a tour of inspection, in which everything was voted satisfactory, the party said good-bye to Peters, and took their way to the Hall to avail themselves of Mr. Johnson's hospitality.

Mr. Brain, although he was what is called a self-made man, as the agent for several large estates in the neighbourhood, was a person of considerable importance in the county. He lived about twelve miles from Bosby, but, being a man of system, found no difficulty in managing properties at a still greater distance from his own home. His daughter, who seemed to Joey as pretty a girl as he ever wished to see, was frank and unaffected in her

manner, and without a trace of anxiety as to her position in county society.

The afternoon was spent, pleasantly enough, looking over the house, the adjoining offices, and the estate. It was finally agreed that Joey should take the lease of The



Hall for seven, fourteen, twenty-one years, but that the land belonging to it should for the present remain in the owner's hands, the lease dating from the 31st of July.

When Sam arrived with his cart to take him to the train, Joey was conscious of retaining Miss Brain's hand in his a trifle longer than was necessary, and of hoping that the slight blush upon her cheek did not exist only in his imagination.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was not until he was comfortably settled in the corner of a first-class carriage that Crichton began to abuse Peters and his hounds, and to turn the Bosby Hunt to ridicule. Joey argued, but in vain, that they must make allowance for Peters on account of his age, temper, and eccentricity. He did not hesitate to express his admiration of the old man's keenness in supporting his own theories ; but was, nevertheless, finally overborne at every point by his superior. Even the puddings were brought up in evidence :

“What right has he to be rude to you ?” said Crichton. “It is his place to know how the puddings are made, not yours ! I have never in all my life seen a man who has struck me as being less like a gentleman's servant. His denunciation of riding merely means that he can't ride himself. His abuse of the Quorn shows his ignorance of the strides we have made in fox-hunting. His contempt for a hound with a pedigree proves that he doesn't know how hounds can be improved by careful breeding. In short, his ideas on everything connected with hunting are antiquated and ridiculous. Look at him ! Look at the whip, the kennel-feeder, the hounds—they all look as if they had come out of the ark ! I'll tell you what will happen, not once, but every time you go out. As sure as you get into a good run Peters will be left behind—you will be alone with the hounds ; suddenly they will

come to a check ; you will see the sheep huddled together on the far side of the field, and will know perfectly well that they have been over the line, and that your fox has gone on ; you try and lift the hounds ; they don't take the very slightest notice of you, but stand there looking for Peters, who has got stuck up in some place he has got into and can't get out of. At last he comes up, and won't listen to you—of course he won't, although he hasn't the slightest idea what has happened. He casts back ; doddering old men like him always cast back ; if they can't see a reason for it they invent one, because they know they can't keep with the hounds if they go for'ard. At last, when he does cast for'ard, and hits off the scent, it's too late ; there's half an hour wasted ; your fox is forty minutes ahead of you, and, after pottering on slower and slower for a mile or two, you give it up, and go home. My dear fellow, I've seen it done scores of times. You ask my advice ?—Give him the sack."

Joey felt like a man who has got into deep water and can't swim. The waves seemed to be closing above his head.

"Don't look like that, Spinks," said Crichton, affecting to laugh at his friend's despondent expression, "there's nothing to be down-hearted about. It is easy enough to put things right, and make the Hunt what it has never been before."

If a drowning man clutches at a straw, how welcome must be the arrival of a strong swimmer to his assistance. Joey was filled with gratitude to his deliverer. Once convinced that it was to the advantage of sport that Peters should go, Joey more easily overcame his scruples with regard to the justice of the step he was contemplating. An old man could hardly expect to be kept on when he was, by his own showing, past his work ; no doubt he had feathered his nest, and could retire and live in comfort,

and he would enjoy a rest from the work he was no longer equal to. It was not Joey's business to look after Mr. Johnson's old servant ; in any case it would be easy to find some suitable employment for him about the place. These arguments, in addition to others which Crichton was constantly supplying, finally decided Joey to get rid of Peters. The next question was where to get another huntsman.

Here, again, no difficulty presented itself to the fertile brain of Joey's adviser.

"Supposing," he said, "the worst came to the worst, and you couldn't find another huntsman, why shouldn't you carry the horn yourself?"

Joey smiled (whose vanity would not be tickled by such a proposal), and shook his head : "No, my dear Crichton, it wouldn't do, although I own I have thought I should like to hunt the hounds myself after serving an apprenticeship for a year or two ; for there is no doubt, as far as pure hunting is concerned, the huntsman has nine-tenths of the fun. Ah ! Crichton," he concluded with a sigh, "If I only had your experience !"

The gentleman thus addressed raised his hand deprecating such flattery. The experience alluded to, our reader will believe, had been made the most of. Joey was not aware that it was restricted to the regimental pack over which the Captain presided for a short period, during which their quarry was generally a red herring, sometimes a hare, and on rare occasions a bag-fox. Nevertheless, knowing at least as much about the business as his friends, and being unquestionably a fine horseman, he had easily earned a reputation as a sportsman ; nor had he learned enough to have any doubt of his own capabilities, provided he were given the opportunity of putting them to the test.

Such were the thoughts that ran through his mind as he

raised his hand, and said : " My dear Spinks, you underestimate your own powers. Of course, having actually hunted a pack of hounds gives me an advantage over anyone who has never tried his hand at it ; but a fellow like you with a natural turn for sport can pick up a great deal in a short time, and surely a man who is a gentleman by birth and education should be able to learn quicker than the ordinary huntsman. I don't suppose Peters knows how to spell his own name.

" You would hardly believe what a difference there was in our hounds after I had had them a few months. Our fellows couldn't make it out ; they had hardly ever known what it was to have a good run, and were astonished beyond measure when we had ' a clinker ' day after day. There is no reason whatever why you should not do the same if you will give your time to it. Depend upon it that's the reason there are not more gentlemen huntsmen ; they won't take the trouble to learn their business at first starting and devote themselves to their hounds."

Joey still shook his head. " Very likely," said he, " I should learn quicker than some of them, and I would gladly give myself up to it, but what would happen while I was learning ? "

" Well, then, look here," said Crichton, " I'll tell you what—understand it is merely a suggestion—supposing I were to give you a start, the first season say. You would be virtually hunting the hounds yourself, I should be at hand to help you if you wanted any assistance. What do you say ? "

Here was a matter for Joey's serious consideration.

The unselfishness of Crichton's proposal was obvious. What inducement could there be for him to devote himself to another man's hounds, only to hand them over to him when he had brought them to perfection ? It was almost too much for anyone to expect, even from his greatest friend.

Then, the members of the Hunt ought certainly to be consulted. Such a serious step was hardly contemplated when the Committee offered him the mastership on certain conditions. If he turned Peters off—which might seem reasonable enough—they would expect the Hunt to be carried on on the old lines and to have a professional appointed as his successor.

Eventually, Joey assented to Crichton's proposal on the following conditions, viz., that the Committee should be consulted, and that all expenses should be defrayed by Joey himself. He even hinted, but with such delicacy that the hint seemed lost upon his friend, that it would be only fair to give him a salary equal to his services.

These important matters agreed upon, things proceeded apace. It was decided to draft a few good hounds (and it was worth paying a good price for them) into the pack, as it was too late in the year to think of getting rid of the present lot—to discharge the whip, and to engage two first-rate men in his place—to keep on Sam, as it was an advantage to have a kennel-feeder to whom the hounds were accustomed. Rough stabling was to be run up at the Hall, and alterations made in Peter's cottage for the whips' accommodation.

The days passed quickly ; Joey's time was fully occupied—chiefly in town—looking at horses and visiting shops. Saddlery, horse-clothing, stable utensils of every sort and kind, and a thousand things beside had to be bought. He often doubted if he could have done it all without Crichton's assistance. He certainly would never have thought of half the things which were absolutely necessary ; nor did he notice, what was peculiar enough, that the shopman was always much more profuse in his thanks to his friend than to himself. If he had noticed it he would, in all probability, have considered it the natural effect of Crichton's unquestioned superiority.

Not infrequently, whenever of his own accord he wanted to buy something that had taken his fancy in passing a shop window, his adviser would insist upon his not being extravagant, and on these occasions he was deeply impressed by the advantage of having someone with him to direct and control his expenditure.

So the weeks flew by. Roehampton swarmed with tradesmen bringing samples for inspection. In all matters of taste Mrs. Spinks was studiously consulted by the Captain, who proved himself invaluable. He did nearly all the correspondence, received the bills, checked the items (alas! filling in many a blank space with the price of the article purchased), and did everything but sign the cheques. He overlooked nothing, forgot nothing, was ever ready with a suggestion, could cope with any tradesman, from the tin-smith to the picture-dealer, so that a hundred times a day Joey exclaimed "By Jove, Crichton, what should I have done without you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

PETERS was at work in his garden. The midsummer sun, not yet half-way to its zenith, threw soft shadows across the beds where the dew still glistened in the opening plants. A half-grown son of Galloper sat near him on the gravel walk, snapping at the flies as they buzzed round his head. Presently a low growl from the dog attracted Peter's attention, and he looked up. The postman was at the gate, and had a letter for him. He took the letter, and, followed by the dog, went into the house. There he opened it, and read, not without difficulty—read it again—and again; then sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. His mute companion cocked his puppy-ears wondering what it all meant, and, after a time, unable, as it were, to control his curiosity, laid a heavy paw upon his master's knee. Peters raised himself and gathered one of the dog's soft ears tenderly in his hand; the canary trilled blithely in his cage. "Ah! little bird," he said, "may you never know the sorrow of this poor old heart!—*he* knows, I believe *he* knows," he added, as, with a low whine, the dog laid his chin upon his knee.

Little did Joey think when he wrote that letter of the suffering he was about to inflict upon a fellow-creature. Physical suffering he thought of, and was ready to prevent, but mental agony did not enter into his calculations.

How easy it is to criticise, and how difficult to perform! How often the humility of true genius has shrunk from

the lash of the ignorant and merciless critic! The world bows before the fashion of the day; the engravings that Sir Joshua Reynolds declared would alone immortalise his name, thirty years ago, were sold in open market for a shilling a-piece. It is vain to say genius will assert itself—perhaps it will—but of the poets and painters whom we catalogue with pride, how many have lived and died in penury! The lights that have risen we can count, but can we number those that have been quenched? Who can tell of the happiness wrecked, of the homes made desolate, of the life crushed slowly from sad hearts by the witty word of a clique, or the thoughtless creature of a fashion! The crushing criticism falls too heavily upon the short life, and the notes of the singer have floated away unheeded, save by the messengers of Heaven.

“Genius begins where rule ends.” The true genius is the student who, following humbly in the footprints of bygone masters of his art, can, when these fail, step boldly on, where others in their turn may follow and excel. But who can say, “Here man has never trod?” What were the Ancients to whose wisdom Job and Homer bowed? As far as history reaches, the human intellect has not advanced one jot. Which, then, are we to believe—that the powers of this intellect, automatically evolved in our ape-like progenitors, have been stagnant since it became rational; or, that there was a time when God made man in His own image and saw that it was good?

Though not one of the “fine arts,” hunting may still claim to be an art; and a huntsman, without expecting to be ranked with Shakespeare, Titian, and Michael Angelo, may be called a genius.

Of the history of his art Peters knew little. The name of Nimrod, that mighty hunter before the Lord, was familiar to him—in fact he had narrowly escaped being

christened by it. He had heard, too, the story of Adonis, and appreciated the lad's devotion to his favourite pastime; but it mattered little to him who first tamed the dog or broke the horse. The rules he followed had descended by



tradition from generation to generation. Hugh Lupus—*le gros veneur*—who harried the Welsh, probably knew how to lay on the royal pack, or head the noble quarry so that his royal master might cut in and watch his leading hounds at work, and sound his horn as he urged his

steed across the vale and up the down's steep side, and from the ridge discern the lengthening pack descending to the woods; and it is not impossible that the craft of "the Wolf" had come down in a direct line to our friend Peters.

Through, whatever channels the traditions had de-



scended to him, he was a thorough workman, and to be discharged by an ignoramus for being beyond his work was like iron entering into his soul.

Mrs. Peters, as is not uncommon in that class of life, was older than her husband, and twice his size. In their case the precepts of the "matrimonial service" were reversed. It was she who cherished, while he honoured and obeyed.

When she entered the room where her husband still sat in deep dejection, she saw in a moment that something was wrong. The letter lay upon the floor ; she picked it up, and slowly mastered its contents.

"It's 'a shame," she cried at last, "I'll write to Mr. Johnson ; you shan't be turned away ! Where can you get another place ? People don't want old men—I wonder they don't shoot you like an old 'os !" and she flung down the letter and stamped her foot so that the house shook.

"'Taint no good, Jemima ; we've got to go, so there's an end on it. I knew it when I saw them two walk away from the kennel-door. Says I to myself, 'Peters' you're an old fool, your temper's done it at last.' My dear kind master, why didn't you shoot me before you left !"

CHAPTER IX.

IN the beginning of August the village of Bosby was alive with excitement. The carpenters had nearly finished their work at the Hall ; the stables had been fitted with all the latest improvements, and Dawkins was to arrive in a day or two with his horses. The Spinks family were expected to follow him shortly. The Bonds, who were still away on the Continent, had written to say they were coming back to Spetchley immediately, and Lord Unwin had bespoken his old quarters at the village inn. The gossips were all busy discussing the probable events of the new order of things.

The news of Peter's dismissal raised a storm of indignation among his friends. The farmers around the neighbourhood, whose crops and fences Peters had always been careful not to damage more than he could help, talked of getting up a "round robin," petitioning that he should be reinstated ; but when it became known that even Mr. Johnson's efforts in the same direction had failed, that the new whips were already in possession of Peters' house, and Captain Crichton appointed as his successor, they seemed to lose heart, and when it was found that money was beginning to flow in a steady stream from Roehampton to Bosby, those who were most likely to profit by its fertilising influence by degrees allowed their ardour to abate, and in a few weeks Peters' cause was either forgotten or crowded out by matters of greater importance.

Moreover Peters himself, having accepted the offer of a small cottage belonging to Mr. Johnson on the outskirts of the village, had retired from the world, and was sulking, like Achilles in his tent, behind the high wall that surrounded his garden. Here he sat day after day brooding over his wrongs, in company with the son of Galloper, the only living thing besides his wife and the canary that he had taken with him from his old home.

The garden was choked with weeds, the paths were green, and the fruit trees spread their shoots unpruned ; but he had no heart to work. Injured and forgotten, he sat and meditated his revenge.

In the meantime, Joey was making preparations for leaving Roehampton.

The carriage drive was filled with Pickford's vans, cocoa-nut matting, and furniture. Men were hurrying in and out of the house collecting chairs, carpets, sofas, wardrobes, and all the accumulations of civilisation preparatory to packing them, and starting for Bosby. The stable-yard was the scene of similar confusion. Dawkins, who had just arrived from Bosby, whither he had already taken one lot of horses from London, was in command, superintending the departure of the rest of his master's stud.

Joey and his mother were in the business-room, sorting papers, tearing up letters, and making their final preparations for leaving their old home, when Bullock appeared in the doorway. On being asked what he wanted, he entered and closed the door behind him. It was some time before he spoke, but at length he blurted out, "Very sorry, Mrs. Spinks, but I can't go." Mrs. Spinks looked at him, and from him to Joey, in bewilderment.

"But we don't want you to go," she said at last.

"He means to Bosby, mother," said her unhappy son,

who was fully and miserably conscious of the situation. He had seen the clouds gathering for some time, but had been afraid to do or say anything to precipitate the storm which he fondly hoped he might escape. He knew that Bullock and Dawkins had both been in Lord Bulstrode's service, but it had not occurred to him that they might have been there together, or could have any reason for disliking one another. Bullock, on his part, growing more and more morose since he had last seen Dawkins, had done from obstinacy what Joey had done from timidity, namely, avoided as far as possible any mention of the subject, so that, strange as it may seem, it was not until Dawkins actually appeared in the stable yard, and, armed with a letter from Mr. Spinks, set about removing the horses that Bullock knew for a fact that he had been deposed from the supreme command of his master's stud.

The fact that Dawkins came from Bosby at all, for Bullock was quite equal to taking half a dozen horses from one house to the other, was due to Crichton, who, foreseeing what would happen, found it easy to persuade Joey that, if there must be a row between the two men, they had far better have it out at Roehampton than start in a strange neighbourhood by creating a scandal. The worst that Joey had allowed himself to anticipate was an outburst of jealousy and indignation, and he was accordingly almost as much taken aback as his mother, when Bullock explained, with considerable force and dignity of manner, that nothing would persuade him to remain under the same roof with, or in the proximity of, the new stud groom, whether above, under, or independently of him.

"It is not my place, madam," he said, addressing his mistress, "to dictate to you, nor to advise you regarding your servants. What lies between me and Mr. Dawkins concerns no one besides us two. Had Mr. Joseph asked my advice in the first instance—and I may say I wish he

had done so—it might have been different, but no one shall ever say that George Bullock lost another man his situation. Your kindness, madam, and yours, Mr. Joseph,” he added, turning to his young master with tears in his eyes, “I shall never forget as long as I live. Believe me, sir, I bear you no ill-feeling—from the bottom of my heart I say it—I bear you no ill-feeling for what you have done. You have a right to do what you like. You owe me nothing, whereas I am indebted to you for many years of happiness spent in your service. No, sir, nothing you can say now will alter my determination, but if you should ever be in trouble, Mr. Joseph, and think of old Bullock, let him know and he will come to you.”

Joey, not being able to trust himself to speak, held out his hand. Bullock pressed it with emotion, and then, falling on his knees before his beloved mistress, seized and passionately kissed her hand, rose to his feet and left the room.

Half an hour later, when Joey went to look for him, he was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Crichton had been busily employed throughout the summer in furthering his own interests, his partner, accomplice, fellow-conspirator—or whatever name our reader may think most aptly describes Lord Unwin—had been in London wondering why he had not been asked to Roehampton. Every attempt to procure the desired invitation had been frustrated, and for some time he had suspected that it was Crichton's intention to deprive him of any share in the profits of their undertaking. The London season was come to an end, his occupation was gone, and he was anxious to leave town, but before doing so he was determined to bring Crichton to book. He wrote, accordingly, asking him to call the next afternoon as he wished to see him on a matter of importance, and was now walking to and fro in his rooms in St. James' Street awaiting his tardy arrival. He appeared impatient, worried, and out of humour. Now and again he stopped to look at a letter which he held in his hand, but it did not seem to afford him much consolation. The room was in disorder; the pictures had been taken down and were standing on the floor against the walls; the carpet was littered with books and papers; on the writing-table lay an open gun-case and a heap of cartridges; a chest, of which the drawers were half open, disclosed a mass of wearing apparel of every description; while on the chairs, sofa, tables, and every article of furniture were thrown, in reckless confusion, boots of every kind, hats, coats,

breeches, and all the paraphernalia of a bachelor's *ménage*. The profusion gave an impression rather of careless extravagance than wealth.

The door opened, and Crichton, without troubling himself to knock, walked into the room. Lord Unwin, as if anxious to conceal the fact that anything unpleasant had happened, slipped the letter under the lid of the gun-case and welcomed his visitor with every appearance of cordiality.

"Going down to Bosby already?" said the latter, clearing one end of the sofa, and settling himself among the soft cushions while he cast his eye round the bare walls. "But you are not going to take all these things are you?"

"No, the bulk of them are going to Bosby, but I go north to-morrow for the 12th, and shan't be back till September. You see I am giving up these rooms."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Only the old complaint, a slight pecuniary hernia. I have suffered from it before and have found change of air and scene is the best treatment for it."

"How's the governor?"

"In much the same state as myself, I'm afraid. I do manage to get hold of a little money occasionally, but hang me if I can make out how he gets along at all. No doubt living is cheap abroad, but I've never yet discovered the place where one can live for nothing."

"Hulloa! what have we got here?" exclaimed Crichton, who, seeing the gun-case, had risen and was examining its contents, "a new pair of 'Purdeys'! This accounts for the bankruptcy!"

"Not at all, my dear fellow, unless you have heard that Purdey has gone bankrupt. But they really are beauties, you shall feel how perfectly they are balanced."

The guns were then put together, and the two connoisseurs spent the next quarter of an hour in putting

them to their shoulders, lowering them and raising them again, while they fixed their eyes on the knobs of the shutters and old nail-holes in the wall, until at last they were satisfied that perfection had been attained. Then followed a long discussion on the merits of various new breech-loading actions which led the conversation to the subject of shooting in general and the grouse prospects for the coming season in particular. Having done his best to exhaust an inexhaustible topic, Crichton suddenly exclaimed, "I had no idea it was so late. I must be off. We shall meet next at Bosby."

"Not so fast, my dear fellow," said Lord Unwin; "I didn't send for you to show you my guns."

"What is it you want?" Crichton asked, impatiently, evidently anxious to avoid any further conversation.

"Sit down, and I will tell you."

Crichton resumed his seat.

"I want to know about these hounds," Lord Unwin began, drawing up a chair and sitting down opposite his friend, "Where do I come in?"

"You got the money I sent, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I was very glad to get it; but I suppose your accounts are not audited?"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this—It was I introduced you to Old Bond—it was I got Spinks the mastership—I found Dawkins for you—I got Johnson to let Spinks have the Hall—I persuaded the Committee to let him sack Peters and make you huntsman—so I think I am entitled to a *fair* share of the profits."

"And you've had it."

"I have only your word for it."

"Whose word do you expect besides mine?"

"Of course I know these things can't be done exactly in a business-like way, but I should like to have some account—something in writing."

"I'm not very fond of writing," said Crichton, with an almost imperceptible sneer, "but what have you to complain of? Several of Spink's horses have passed through your hands; you oughtn't to blame me if you haven't made the most of your chances. You can't expect more at present. Spinks has already more horses than he can possibly make use of. He's a generous little beggar, and will let you ride them as much as you like. Then there's the shooting; he has rented all the coverts he can lay hands on round Bosby, and Brain has let him have a good deal more on his side of the country. Besides, you will be on the spot, and will have every advantage that I have."

"That all sounds very fine, my dear Crichton, but, to begin with, I like riding my own horses—if some one else pays for them so much the better; and I don't care to be seen sponging on the descendants of hair-dressers. As for the shooting, that is an excellent amusement, but firing away cartridges won't pay for that pair of 'Purdeys;' and as for being on the spot, that is the very point I want to speak to you about. How is it I have not been asked to Roehampton?"

Crichton leisurely re-lit his cigar and adjusted the cushions.

"You evidently think," he began, after he had comfortably settled himself, "that I lie on a bed of roses and keep you shivering outside in the cold. I can only give you my word as a gentleman" (it was Unwin's turn to sneer) "that this isn't the case at all. Spinks isn't nearly such a fool as you think, and his mother, as I told you long ago, is the very devil. You may congratulate yourself that I manage her as well as I do. If I had known as much about her as I do now, Spinks should never have taken the Hall. We ought to have got him down there by himself. I told you so at the time, but you would have it your own way."

"It's no use regretting that now, or trying to throw the blame on me. I ask you a plain question : You have been at Roehampton all this time, why haven't you got them to invite me down there ?"

"You seem determined to hear what you won't like. I have done all I can, but Mrs. Spinks refuses to have anything to say to you."

"Why, what can she know about me ?"

Crichton shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"Who was she ?"

"The wife of a London barber."

"And before that ?"

"A dev'lish good-looking girl, I should think ; but what is the use of asking me all these questions ? What are you driving at ?"

Lord Unwin took the letter from under the gun-case, and handed it to his friend. "Read that," he said, "and see if it throws any light on the subject."

Crichton stretched himself, took the letter, yawned as if its contents were a matter of perfect indifference to him, and read as follows :—

Ostend, August 6th.

"DEAR NED,—Sorry to disappoint you again, but I'm cleaned out. You must look to your mother wit for supplies, not to your old dad. There's no use your coming over here ; they are as sharp as you are. I never expected you would get much out of our Hebrew friends. Have you tried old Mordecai ? If not, try him with cent. per cent. ; a thousand per cent. wouldn't make any difference to anyone except himself. What a fool you were to cut off the entail ! I am feeling very shaky, my nerves are not what they were. The mirrors in my room—there are five or six of the beastly things—make me look very old and infernally ugly. You are young, and your brain is still active ; see what you can do, and if you have any luck send your old dad a few shillings to pay

for his funeral. It seems hard, when I see all these d—d foreigners swelling it up and down the ‘digue,’ that I can’t get anything out of them. There’s a rich old gal here has an eye on my coronet ; if the worst comes to the worst I may have to raise her to the peerage. I wish those copies I had made of the old portraits were as good as the originals. Do you think they would fetch anything ? I should like you to keep mine ; anyhow you would get very little for a portrait of

“your affectionate DAD.

“P.S.—I wonder if your Spinks is the man that married about the neatest filly I ever set eyes on.”

Crichton returned the letter without comment.

“Well, what have you got to say ?” said Lord Unwin, who was becoming more and more irritated by Crichton’s manner.

“Nothing, except that the poor old chap seems in a bad way.”

“But the postscript—hang it man ! what about the postscript ?”

“Really, Unwin, you should know more about your father’s lady friends than I !”

Up to this point Lord Unwin had hoped to come to terms with his partner without straining their delicate relationship by threatening extreme measures ; but now, finding that milder measures did not produce the desired effect, he determined to make a final trial of strength.

“There’s nothing to be gained by beating about the bush,” he began ; “let us clearly understand one another. You appear to fancy that you can take advantage of an accident and pitch me overboard, but we have sailed too long together for that, and I know a little too much about you. I’m willing to steer straight, if you are. If you’re not, I drop a spark into the powder magazine and up she goes.”

“By Jove, Unwin, you’re becoming quite a poet with your metaphors; but they might be more exact, for it seems to me as if I was on board and you’re angry because you can’t get into the ship.”

“You needn’t trouble yourself about my metaphors. In plain English, if you get into Bosby Hall and I don’t, you know what to expect.”

“Don’t lose your temper, my dear fellow, I don’t mind your metaphors—I’ll give you one myself quite as old, and a little better; if the kettle (you’re the kettle) fights with the pot (I’m the pot) it don’t matter which of them upsets the other, out goes the fire! I tell you—you needn’t believe me unless you like—I have done my best for you, and will still try to do all I can; but if you’re going to lose your head, the sooner we chuck business the better.”

In a quarrel, the party who loses his temper generally gets the worst of it; and Lord Unwin found himself in the condition of an unskilful general who has revealed his own position without inflicting any material damage or even drawing the fire of his enemy, or, to use a more homely comparison, like the man who has threatened to bite his own nose off to spite his face, and has nothing left but to carry out his threat.

“I have to get down to Bosby,” said Crichton, rising leisurely from the sofa, “so if you have nothing more to say I will wish you good-bye.”

So saying, with repeated assurances of his good faith, he took his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was a late harvest, the trees had already taken their autumn tints, an early frost or two had begun to make the



brown leaves patter in the woods, and the partridges, thanks to Joey's No. 6, had learnt to crouch closer in the

long stubble, before it was possible to commence cub-hunting.

All the residents in the neighbourhood, including Lord Unwin, had left cards at the Hall, and most of these visits had been returned.

Every moment Joey could spare was spent with Crichton in the kennels. The greater part of his time was taken up in visiting the boundaries of his country, learning the topography of the coverts, and making the acquaintance of the farmers and keepers whose goodwill was most necessary to the Hunt.

In these visits he was nearly always accompanied by Lord Unwin, whose knowledge of the country he found of the greatest assistance. Had his mother spoken to him about Lord Unwin, which she could not bring herself to do, he might easily have found another escort ; as it was, their acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy, and Joey had no hesitation in asking his friend to his house, and there were many occasions on which the invitation was inevitable.

Lord Unwin could, when he took the trouble, make himself particularly agreeable, and on these occasions was at such pains to charm his hostess, that by degrees he softened her animosity, and eventually succeeded in winning her toleration.

The cub-hunting season had at length arrived ; everything was ready for the commencement of hostilities, and to inaugurate the campaign, and to return the hospitalities already received, invitations had been issued for a small dinner-party at the Hall.

Joey and Mrs. Spinks were in the drawing-room ready to receive their guests. The first arrivals were the Vicar and his sister, who came on foot and left their goloshes in the front hall. The Rev. Mr. Marshall was between fifty and sixty years of age ; he was tall, but his attenuated

frame, that had been wiry in youth, was slightly bowed ; he was clean shaved, and had somewhat the appearance of an ascetic, but the kindly smile that lit up his face when



he spoke showed that, however badly he might treat himself, he was at least tender in his dealings with his fellow-men ; his voice declared him at once a gentleman and a

scholar, nor could one be five minutes in his presence without feeling that the word "reverend" was the most suitable adjunct to his name. Before he became vicar of Bosby he was a master in one of our great public schools, and there are many—now grey-headed men themselves, with boys of their own, perchance, at the same school—who can remember how, when they came up in turn to say their "repetition," he would lay his large-printed book on the desk before him, while not one of them would think, even for a moment, of taking advantage of the confidence thus undesignedly shown in his honour. Nay, schoolmasters—conscientious, hard-working, but ever suspicious and sceptical of schoolboys' honour—do not laugh; such masters schoolboys love!

Miss Marshall, an elderly lady, bore a strong resemblance to her brother, which had not grown less during twenty years of constant companionship.

The next to arrive were Mr. and Mrs. Brain and their daughter, the last looking quite charming in a simple white muslin dress trimmed with real roses.

"I hope your father got my letter," said Joey, as he advanced to meet her, "and that he will be able to bring you to the meet to-morrow. I made it at Whiston Wood on purpose to give you a chance of coming out."

Her reply was prevented by the entrance of the Bond family, who were closely followed by Lord Unwin, the last to appear being Captain Crichton, who emerged from the "bachelor's wing," where he occupied a suite of rooms, admirably adapted to his ideas of comfort and convenience.

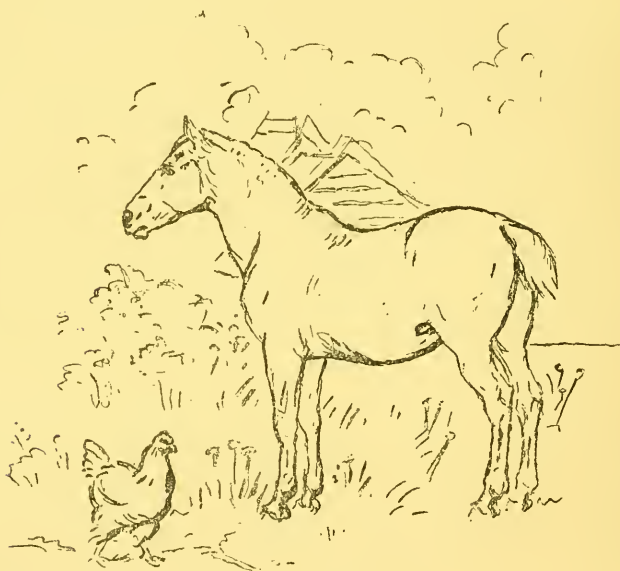
Instead of following them through the menu, we will betake ourselves to the cottage on the outskirts of the village, where Peters and Sam sit plotting the destruction of the Bosby parliament.

About the same time that Crichton was remarking to

Miss Brain on the excellent combination of cod and oyster sauce, the kennel-feeder drew a short black pipe and a bit of blacker tobacco from the pocket of his long worsted waistcoat.

“Where’s the stuff?” said Peters.

Sam jerked his head towards the garden, and said by way of explanation. “’Twerent necessary to bring it inside.”



“Have you brought the old mare?”

“In the shed,” said Sam as he filled his pipe with the fragrant shavings in the palm of his hand; “she’ll do; she is used to lie out o’ nights.”

There was a good deal of puffing and squinting at the bowl of his pipe, before its contents could be said to be going strong and well; he then went on: “The hounds are come—three couple and a half—the whips talk a wonderful lot about their pedigrees, but such a slab-sided

looking lot of brutes I never see'd. Wherever they come from I can't think. They ain't like the 'osses, that's certain. Whoever got *them* knew what he was about."

The information about the new hounds seemed to afford Peters some satisfaction. He sat smiling to himself some time before he said:

"D'ye think, Sam, they'll miss the mare from the kennel field?"

"No—and if they do they'll think she's in the boiler—but ain't it about time for you to start?"

Peters went to the window and looked out. The night was pitch dark.

"Jemima," he called to his wife, who could be heard stamping about overhead, "bring down them things will you, and don't forget the rattle what frightens the rooks."

Before long Mrs. Peters appeared carrying a bundle containing, among other things, a smock frock, an old large-brimmed straw hat, a pair of hob-nailed boots, and the rattle, and her husband, taking the things from her, proceeded to transform himself into the figure of a portly yokel.

"A little more straw under the waistcoat," said Sam, as Peters completed his toilet, "and you could ride under their noses without their knowing you."

"Maybe you're right, Sam, though I don't think any of 'em will see me, let's have another handful. There—now the rattle, it's getting late. Bring the lantern, Jemima, and let's see what we are about."

So saying, Peters led the way into the garden, where Sam lifted a sack, and, going round to the shed behind the cottage, presently brought the old mare out on to the road.

"Here, Sam, give me the sack," said Peters, as he settled himself in the saddle, "and don't forget to mention, just casual-like, in the village that I ain't at all well; don't say too much, or you'll have 'em all buzzing about here to

know what's the matter with me. Ph—e—ew," he exclaimed, as he swung the sack over his shoulder, "If that don't do the trick, I'm bothered if I know what will," saying which he jogged off into the darkness.

His way lay by unfrequented roads, and there was little chance of his meeting any one. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he improved his pace, and the old mare, either conscious of her reprieve from a sudden and disgraceful death, or recognising that she had a horse-man on her back, recovered her spirits as she went on, and after a mile or two was stepping out with the gaiety of a four-year-old.

"Well I never," said Peters to himself, "only to think of sending a mare like this to the kennels ! What will they do next ? Her feet are all out of shape, I can feel that without looking at 'em. Of course if the feet gets out of shape everything else must get out of shape to suit 'em just like a pair of tight boots—there ain't much difference. There was that white 'os, Strathspey, by Strathconan—Phew ! I'm glad the wind ain't at my back—he was sent to the kennels. Hutchins gave me thirty shillings for him, and drove him for eight years. I don't know what gentlemen are thinking about ; no excuse seems too ridiculous : one horse is sent there because he won't jump water, another because he won't jump nothing else, and another because he's an old favourite and no one else shan't ride him. I'll tell you what, old lady, if our little plan comes off, you shall have another day with the hounds before you knocks under, and that's a promise !" Thus soliloquising, he approached the village of Pockford, which was rather more than seven miles from Bosby. The butcher's shop, where Mr. Simpson carried on his business, lay in the centre of it. It so happened Peters had a bone to pick with the butcher, and for that reason, perhaps, selected him for his victim on the present occasion. As he de-

scended the hill towards the ford from which the village takes its name, he threw the sack he was carrying into the ditch by the side of the road, saying, "it won't do to let our friend get a whiff of that," and shortly afterwards arrived at Simpson's house.

Everything was in darkness, but after Peters had hammered at the door for some time with his stick a light



appeared, one of the windows in the upper story was thrown open, and a head, surmounted by a white night-cap asked who was there, and what he wanted at that time of night.

"I want to see Mr. Simpson," said Peters, standing under the house, well in the shadow, and feigning the voice of the yokel he was intended to represent.

"Then you can say you've seen him," replied the head, angry at being roused from its first sleep, and preparing to close the window.

"Wait a minute! Mr. Spinks would be very much obliged if you would help him to catch some stray hounds."

The name of the new M.F.H. produced an immediate impression, and the butcher, seeing a chance of securing the custom of Bosby Hall, suddenly became most anxious to do anything to oblige.

"Certainly, sir, certainly—most happy to do what I can for Mr. Spinks."

"Well, then," said Peters, getting still closer to the house as Simpson was moving the light about, trying to get a glimpse of his interlocutor, "would you mind laying some offal and the trimmings of a few sheepskins about in your yard on the chance of catching them. You needn't be afraid of their doing any damage; Mr. Spinks will gladly pay for it if they do. See that the trimmings aren't too dry, and mind and shut the gates when you get the hounds inside."

"Certainly, it shall be done, it shall be done; you may tell Mr. Spinks that this, and any further orders, shall be promptly attended to."

"You had better do it at once, as the hounds may be about here any time."

"Certainly, sir," reiterated Simpson, all politeness and attention; "if you will wait half a moment I will come down to you."

"Sorry I can't wait any longer just now; I have some way to ride, and it's getting late."

The butcher, who was now as anxious to detain the disturber of his rest as he had been a short time since to get rid of him, suddenly bethought him of his quarrel with the old huntsman, and decided that, although he

had lost his place, he might possibly be useful as a friend, and would probably be able to do him harm as an enemy. Accordingly, once more accosting his visitor he said : " By-the-by, have you heard anything of old Peters lately ? "

" He was pretty bad when I last heard of him," replied the horseman ; " have you got any message for him ? "

" Dear me ! " said the worldly-minded Simpson in a tone of tender concern, " I'm very grieved to hear that. If you happen to see him, tell him I'm sorry about that little tiff we had lately. He'll know what it means. He's a queer-tempered old devil, but I don't want to be hard on him now he's in trouble."

" That's very kind of you, Mr. Simpson, very kind indeed—I'm sure the old devil will be very glad to hear it ! Good-night, don't forget the trimmings and the offal." Saying which, Peters turned his mare's head towards home and, scarcely able to restrain his merriment till he was out of hearing, trotted back to the place where he had left his sack in the ditch.

Shortly afterwards Simpson returned from the yard adjoining his house, where he had carried out his nocturnal visitor's instructions to the letter, and, getting into bed, kept his sleepy spouse awake half the night listening to the extravagant possibilities that were likely to result from the capture of the missing hounds.

CHAPTER XII.

WHISTON WOOD formed the apex of an isosceles triangle, being eight miles from Pockford and Bosby.

The night was still dark, but the wind had risen and the broken clouds allowed the rays of the full moon now and again to penetrate the darkness. Peters kept to the road and, jogging steadily along, soon after midnight reached the furthest point in his night's pilgrimage.

The wood, which covered several hundred acres, was intersected by numerous rides as familiar to Peters as his own garden paths. It was a stronghold for foxes; from time immemorial two or three litters had been bred within its boundaries. As Peters stood on the edge of the wood listening to hear if anyone were about—perchance some stealthy poacher or watchful keeper on his rounds—he could hear the night jar's rattle, the unearthly hoot of the owl from his ivied tree, the baying of the watch-dog from some distant farm, and, close by, the short, sharp bark of the night-prowling fox, that told him more surely than his ears that no stranger was moving in the vicinity.

Presently the moon came out and flooded the wood with its full light.

"Ah!" said Peters, apostrophising, we may suppose, the man in the moon, "You're like Mr. Simpson, only a trifle better looking, up there in your window of clouds—very willing to oblige, I'm sure, all orders promptly attended to—you'll do what you can for the 'old devil!'"

Highly amused by his own wit, he drew the rattle from the breast of his smock, and gave it a turn or two. A bird flew from a neighbouring bush, and the night seemed startled to a deeper silence by the sound. Then passing through the gate, he zigzagged down the wood from side to side, from end to end, plying his rattle as he went, till he was certain that any fox that might have been in the



covert had taken his speedy departure for the night. Having done this he returned to the centre of the wood, where he dropped the sack and, holding the string to which it was attached, hauled it behind him up the ride, out through the gate, and across the open fields. The line of country on which he started on leaving the wood was intersected by numerous fences, which at that time of the year would be formidable obstacles to the boldest

horseman. When he came to the first fence he threw the sack into the next field and, making his way round, picked up the string again and dragged the sack along to



the next fence, where he repeated the operation, and so on for about half a mile. Owing to the constant getting

on and off to open gates that had been fastened during the summer, his progress up to this point was slow and tedious, but he now quickened his pace and, making a half turn to the right, set off in a straight line for Pockford. As he knew every yard of the ground, he found no difficulty in making his way across country. Here a gate, there a gap, allowed him to pass unhindered from field to field. A bridle-path led through a long tract of woodland, and opened at length on to a wide common, beyond which only a few fields and the high road lay between him and his destination. And all the time the noisome sack tripped and rolled at the mare's heels, leaving behind it the indelible scent of the foxes' litter it contained.

By three o'clock he was close to Pockford, and, coming to a halt in a narrow strip of firs that grew by the roadside, he dismounted and, hitching his bridle-rein to a post, crept stealthily across the road, pulling the sack behind him into Simpson's yard, where he was pleased to see everything was prepared in exact accordance with his instructions. Then for the last time he lifted his nasty burden and left the yard as noiselessly as he had entered.

The sky was brightening in the east when Peters, for the second time that night, entered Whiston Wood. On the side of the wood furthest from Bosby there was a mound thickly grown with holly-trees, from which a spectator could see anyone approaching for some distance without running any risk of being seen. Behind this shelter Peters took up his position, and waited as patiently as he could the arrival of the hounds.

The sun shooting above the horizon gave promise of a lovely day. The warm rays penetrated Peters' straw-stuffed smock, and set the warm blood circulating in his chilled veins; but was it only the cold night air and want of sleep, or was it nervous anxiety that made his teeth chatter and his limbs tremble, as he lay concealed

behind the hollies? The sound of voices suddenly attracted his attention. "Lucky for me they didn't come through the woods," he said to himself, as he saw Mr. Brain and his daughter ride down the covert-side to meet the hounds.

Presently the glint of a red coat in the distance revealed the approaching cub-hunters, and made Peters' heart thump against his ribs. Gradually he distinguished the Whip riding in front of the hounds, Crichton followed by the second whip, then Joey on a bay horse with Mr. Murray, from Springwood; after them, Lord Unwin and Tom Parkes, and some way behind, Dawkins and two or three grooms bringing up the rear. Now they were joined by Mr. Brain and his daughter; now there was a glimpse of the hounds through a gap in the hedge-row. In another minute he heard, "Eleu in over there; Eleu into covert," the crack of whips, and the sound of the horn as the hounds crashed into the wood. "Yodote, push him up! Yoicks, wind him," came Crichton's voice with orthodox intonation. Peters strained his eyes down the ride. He could see the very spot where he started the drag. "There's Mr. Spinks," he groaned, "coming straight up to it—no, good luck to him! he's turned to the right." Then Galloper shot across the tainted ride, but turned in an instant and feathered on the scent. "Any hound but him! any hound but him!" murmured the agonizing Peters. The puzzled hound worked slowly on the line; one hound joined him, then another and another, pressing forward, pushing one another on—more hounds came—there was a whimper—two—three, and the whole pack gave tongue and raced down the ride.

At the same moment Peters holloaed—not the clear ringing holloa so familiar to his hounds—again he holloaed, and galloped as hard as his old mare could go, in a direction exactly opposite to that which the hounds had taken.

"Ware heel ! 'ware heel," shouted Crichton ;
"'Ware heel," shrieked Joey. "Stop those hounds," cried Mr. Murray to the whip at the bottom of the wood.

Easier said than done. The hounds were gone before the whip could head them. He crammed his horse at a strong "stake and bound," still blind with the summer's undergrowth, and fell headlong on the other side ; meanwhile the rest of the horsemen had galloped to the holloa.

"Who was it holloaed ?" they all exclaimed in one breath, and then stared vacantly around. "Where was the holloa ?" said Crichton. "Where are the hounds ?" asked Joey. "Running heel," said Lord Unwin. "Brace of foxes" said Murray. "B-b-blow your h-orn," said Parkes.

Crichton blew his horn till he was black in the face.

"We sha'n't find the hounds by standing still," said Mr. Brain, "they've gone somewhere."

So they all set off and galloped in every direction, each making what he considered the most likely cast to hit off the man who holloaed, or the hounds.



Joey pulled up at the end of the wood, and gazed anxiously round about. A solitary sheep browsing close at hand looked up at him as if wondering what he was so excited about. It was evident the hounds had not gone that way.

They completed their circuits and met again by the hollies on the mound.

"Seen anything of them?" was the question. "Haven't you?" the invariable reply.

So they parted, and made other circuits, but only to meet again with the same result. The whip, who had caught his horse after a stern chase, came up, and their faces brightened, but he knew nothing except that the hounds were gone. He couldn't turn them, but he heard them running when he was trying to catch his horse. He thought they were to the right but couldn't be quite sure as he had a singing in his head after his fall. No fox left the wood while he was there. The hounds were going like mad; all the new hounds were in front, and Galloper, "the dog what Sam makes such a fuss about," was the last of the whole pack.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Miss Brain, with the most sympathetic intentions; "I'm so sorry, Mr. Spinks, that you have made such a bad beginning!"

Joey devoutly wished he hadn't made the meet within twenty miles of her.

In the meantime the hounds were racing over the fields towards Pockford. Two labourers on their way to work heard them running and climbed on to a bank.

"There they go," exclaimed one of them, "not a soul with 'em, and they won't catch 'em now neither. They wouldn't have giv' old Peters the slip like that anyhow."

"That just comes o' young heads thinking they're wiser than old 'uns, that's what that is," said the other; and thus moralising they betook themselves to their daily task.



"THE HOUNDS WERE RACING OVER THE FIELDS."—Page 84.



Let us imagine ourselves arriving at Pockford with the hounds.

Simpson, who had been awake half the night lecturing his wife, slept later than usual. Strange sounds mingled with his dreams. Monstrous dogs with bovine heads and tufted tails sat glaring at him round his bed, one lay upon his chest and howled. Suddenly he started and awoke. The sounds that had mingled with his dreams seemed to be coming from the yard.

"Wake up, wake up," he said to his wife, "the hounds have come."

"Oh, bother the hounds!" said his wife; "I've heard enough about them; go to sleep, do!" and she drew the blankets closer round her shoulders to keep out the cold air.

"My calf ! I forgot the calf !" cried the butcher, springing out of bed ; and sure enough, as he rushed half-dressed from the back door of his shop, he saw that it was missing from the beam where it was suspended the day before, and could only guess that its remains lay beneath the seething mass of hounds who were tearing and fighting over something in the shed.

What a change from the ideal to the reality ! He went to bed hoping that some time the next day he might have the luck to find one or two hounds peaceably gnawing the horns or the fleshy trimmings he had prepared for them, and imagined himself adroitly closing the gates upon them, and securing the custom of Bosby Hall. He awoke to find his premises turned into a pandemonium in which half a hundred devils in the shape of ravenous dogs were disputing the relics of his fresh-killed calf. This was *ne quid nimis* with a vengeance, and his senses were fairly unhinged by the magnitude of the visitation.

The butcher's first impulse was to save anything that might yet remain of the veal, already bespoken by his customers, and with this idea he seized a pitchfork that lay at hand, and laid it about the hounds right and left with considerable dexterity and effect, but accidentally striking a hound who happened at that moment not to be taking an active part in the proceedings, he caused that animal to lay hold of the calf of his leg with such alacrity that he was compelled to drop the fork, and, happy to escape from the jaws of his assailant, took no further steps towards the recovery of his veal.

His yells soon brought all who were within hearing on the scene, and, as the news spread rapidly through the village, a large crowd was soon collected, congregating at a respectful distance from the hounds, for the sight of the butcher's wound, a lack of personal interest in his misfortune, and a natural curiosity to see the end of the

affair, inclined them to remain spectators rather than become participators in the furious conflict that was being waged.

The struggle ended in the complete dilaniation of the calf ; each hound eventually carrying away his share of the carcase to some corner of the yard where he might enjoy it in peace, and growling fiercely if any of the bystanders had the hardihood to threaten to bereave him of his dole.

Had any one of the hounds, who may have had a distaste for breaking up a fox, been capable of reflection at such a moment, he must have formed a favourable opinion of the new huntsman, who provided such delicacies at the end of a run in the place of the usual unsavoury portion of vulpine anatomy.

No sooner were peace and quiet restored in the yard, than sounds were heard issuing from the interior of the shop. The unhappy butcher on rushing from the house at the first alarm, had thoughtlessly left the door open behind him, and some of the hounds, dissatisfied with their share of the calf, had found their way into the shop, and were now revelling in prime joints of mutton and beef, and they might have continued their revel for some time longer had not one of them, in his anxiety to reach a leg of four-year-old Southdown, caught his upper jaw on the hook by which it was suspended. The frantic yells occasioned by this suicidal manoeuvre were the cause of their immediate discovery and expulsion. The self-suspended hound, lifted by humane arms from his painful position, "took his hook" out of the shop, crying "pen and ink," after his companions.

Whoever of my readers has in youth "touched toes," and undergone the indignity—no, not "indignity," for were not many of us proud of the number and frequency of the chastisements for our small breaches of discipline

—let us say distinction of receiving four cuts from the monitor's cane with its nicely-waxed end, may remember that his physical suffering culminated in the third stroke.

Now Mr. Simpson, who had not the benefit of this experience, fondly imagined that the worst was over. There is a sense of relief when the worst is over, and we know that, having endured so much, whatever happens cannot be past endurance. But the unhappy butcher was quite unprepared for the excruciating pain—enhanced even by the pause which allowed his benumbed nerves to recover their full sensibility—presently inflicted by a third cut from Dame Fortune's relentless cane. He had just become conscious of the scarcity of his attire, and was on the point of ascending the stairs to complete his toilet, when the most appalling shrieks issuing from his wife's bedroom caused an exquisite and unmitigated agony to penetrate his inmost soul.

When Mrs. Simpson, after her husband's abrupt departure, drew the blankets round her shoulders, she went fast asleep, and heard nothing of the disturbance that was going on outside. She would in all probability have remained in this happy state of unconsciousness for an indefinite period had not one of the hounds, a mild-eyed bitch, escaping from the shop, on the principle of any port in a storm, fled for refuge up the staircase, carrying with her a substantial piece of the best streaky bacon. She was closely pursued by another hound, and the two together, bursting through the bedroom door, which was left ajar, rushed straight under the bed, where they began a fierce dispute for the possession of the coveted rasher.

The sleeper was awakened by the awful noise beneath the bedstead, which heaved and shook in a way that was as mysterious as it was alarming. Her first impression was that a terrific earthquake was taking place, but when she saw the china on the washing-stand was undisturbed, and

that the motion was caused by something immediately beneath her, she began screaming "Thieves, fire, murder !" with all the power of her lungs, and, diving beneath the bedclothes, lay there trembling in a cold perspiration.

In this state she was discovered by her terror-stricken husband, and a few of the most courageous of her neighbours, who hastened to her assistance ; and on learning the true cause of her alarm she promptly fell into hysterics.

By this time most of the hounds were asleep. Galloper, bloated beyond recognition, lay extended in the sun. Every now and then his legs twitched, and he yapped feebly—half-opened a blood-shot eye—sighed like a fat porker, from repletion, and, with a grunt, once more composed himself to slumber.

It was not for some hours that he finally awoke, stretched himself, left the yard, and took his way slowly towards the kennels—the rest of the pack following his example by twos and threes during the course of the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE left the cub-hunters in Whiston Wood, wondering what had become of the hounds.

Anyone who has been completely "thrown out," and has had the ignominy of his position forced upon him by meeting some one in the same predicament, will understand the feelings of Joey and his friends on the present occasion. The former, having taken all responsibility on his own shoulders, had naturally been anxious that the first impression should be a favourable one. Of the others, Crichton felt that his reputation as a huntsman was sorely taxed at the outset by an inexplicable accident; Lord Unwin was calculating the chances of Crichton's downfall involving his own; Murray and Parkes, who would like to have said "I told you so," were exchanging glances of mutual understanding; while one and all knew that they had fallen not only in their own and one another's estimation, but also in that of Dawkins and the other grooms, who remained silent witnesses of their discomfiture.

There was nothing for it but to go home; so Mr. Brain and his daughter departed in one direction while the rest of the field rode through the wood towards Bosby.

As they ride along we will take the opportunity of introducing our reader to the two strangers.

Mr. Charles Murray, 35, bachelor, of independent means, residing at Springwood, near Bosby, stood over

6 ft. in his stocking soles, and turned the scale at fourteen stone. He was an all-round sportsman, and a general favourite. No athletic meeting, whether for cricket, football, running, or anything else, could ever be crowned with success except under the direction of his indefatigable spirit. For some years, under Mr. Johnson's master-ship, he had been secretary of the Hunt, and managed such matters as the "finds" and the "poultry" to the satisfaction of farmers, keepers, and subscribers, and to his own credit. He had expressed his opinion strongly against Peters' dismissal, but was overborne by the votes of less liberal subscribers, who, with a regard to their own pockets, thought it advisable to allow Joey—as he was willing to pay the piper—to call the tune. Although outvoted he was not silenced, and continued to inveigh against the injustice and shortsightedness of the Committee's decision. He had a habit of speaking his mind that often gave offence at the time, but was soon forgotten in respect of his good intentions, valuable services, and manly straightforwardness.

During the winter he kept four or five horses, which he was constantly changing, more often than not making a profit on the exchange. They always had a screw loose somewhere, if one could find it ; but, as he was a bold and judicious horseman, he was difficult to beat across his own country.

His intimate friend and neighbour, Mr. Thomas Parkes—"old Tom" was the only name he was ever known by—was a sportsman from the crown of his prematurely-bald head to the soles of his shooting boots. Riding upwards of sixteen stone, he was more likely to be seen at the end of a long run than many a horseman better mounted than himself. He had persistently refused to be made a member of the Hunt Committee, pleading the exigencies of business ; but could always accept an invita-

tion to shoot, and was rarely absent from the field on hunting days. What the business was in which he was so engrossed no one knew exactly. He was generally supposed to be the agent in that part of the world for somebody's tea, for someone else's pianos, and for a dozen other commodities of various kinds—was known to have a share in a wine business, and was always on the look-out to turn an honest penny. He would manage to pay for his days' shooting by buying his host's pheasants on commission for his partners in the wine trade. Where others encountered only the humdrum occurrences of everyday life, he was for ever meeting with strange experiences, and, like Don Quixote, teemed with marvellous adventures, which lost nothing in the telling, and an impediment of speech, which grew more marked as he became excited, added a spicy flavour to his relation of them. As a consequence of this peculiarity, if any good story got about he was sure to be made the hero of it. One of these stories, whether it be true or not, is too good to be forgotten.

On a hot day in the beginning of August he was on his way to play in a cricket match, accompanied by a small boy. The boy, who had just come home for his summer holidays, had been telling him how he won the high jump at his school sports. "D-do you k-know," said "old Tom," "I was a v-ery g-good j-j-jumper when I was a b-boy; I won a s-ilver c-cup for j-j-jumping." Soon after he had made this remark a thunderstorm came up and they ran for shelter under a large oak. The storm rapidly increased in intensity and before long a vivid flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by a loud crack of thunder, broke immediately overhead. The lightning, if it struck nothing else, struck old Tom's conscience. "You k-know" he said, with the greatest difficulty of utterance, as soon as the reverberation had ceased. "I d-didn't

r-eally w-in a s-ilver c-c-cup, b-b-but I w-was a d-d-devilish g-g-good j-j-jumper all the same."

For all this he was a good fellow, with a humble opinion of himself and a generous appreciation of others, and was one of Peters' staunchest admirers.

His stable never contained more than one horse, and might have been empty at this time, as his old hunter died of colic in the spring, had not Mr. Johnson, suspecting the wine trade was not as brisk as might be, begged him, before he left Bosby, to accept the gift of a mare that had carried the "whip" for several seasons. The mare stood a trifle over fifteen hands, was plain-headed, and knuckled over a bit on the fetlock joints. "Old Tom," with his heavy body and short stirrups, looked a world too heavy for her.

He and Murray had hunted with Mr. Johnson from the time they were boys, and their memories were living records of the doings of the Bosby hounds for the past twenty years. They felt keenly the loss of their old friend Peters, and were ready to look upon his successor with a severely critical eye.

Joey's modesty and good-nature disarmed criticism at the outset, but Crichton's manner made a very different impression on the two old members of the Hunt, who were conscious that they were at least as capable of hunting the hounds as he was. The latter took small pains to show them any civility, or to conceal the fact that any advice from them would be considered an unnecessary interference. He would gladly have dispensed with Lord Unwin's services in favour of theirs, but, as Unwin had his finger already fixed ineradicably in the pie, he preferred to let it remain rather than allow others a chance of extracting any of the plums.

The mysterious holloa was as much a mystery after an hour's discussion as it was at first. One suggested that

one of the grooms had holloaed a hare, and had afterwards been ashamed to acknowledge his mistake, but the grooms denied the insinuation, and individually succeeded in proving an *alibi*. Another suggested that there was an echo, but failed to point out the person who made the sound that was echoed. Still another suggestion was that the man who holloaed had gone off with the hounds, but this was impossible, as the holloa was in one direction and the hounds ran in another ; but these, as well as a dozen other theories, failed to explain either the holloa or the disappearance of the hounds.

As they rode home, Parkes and Murray felt that Crichton was mentally drawing invidious comparisons between them on their "crocks" and himself on one of Joey's two-hundred-guinea hunters. They were both touchy about their weights and their horses.

"Isn't your pony rather too fat for hunting?" Crichton said to Parkes, with a smile of superiority.

"And he's likely to remain so," answered Murray, coming to the assistance of his friend, who was struggling to commence a sentence beginning with a mute consonant.

"Perhaps, Mr. Murray," rejoined Crichton, stung by the sarcasm, "you would like to hunt the hounds yourself."

Lord Unwin, anxious to prevent an open quarrel, here interrupted, saying, "At present there are no hounds to hunt, and it is too ridiculous to begin to fight because we have been thrown out by a false holloa," and added, in hopes of propitiating Murray, "That's a useful-looking horse you're on ; can he jump?"

"I'll back him to pound any horse in the Hunt," said Murray, who never missed an opportunity of praising his own horses.

"Well, Murray," said Parkes, pointing as he spoke to a bank with two rails along the top and a ditch on the take-

off side, "I'll b-bet you h-alf a c-crown you d-don't j-j-jump that fence."

Murray was on a tall, raking, bay horse, who showed every rib and muscle in his body, and was rigged out with all the appliances for stopping a runaway.

"Done with you, Tom," he said, and without a moment's hesitation rode at the fence.

His horse, trusting to the combined weight of himself and his rider, made no attempt to clear the full height, but sending the top rail flying, landed without an effort on the other side.

Murray claimed the half-crown, and Parkes put in a counter-claim on the ground that it was not a clear jump.

The argument was taken up by both sides ; and on the question being put to the vote it was decided against Parkes.

"All right, M-Murray," he said, "you had b-better let me s-end you a b-b-bottle of my p-pale sherry."

Good humour was restored by old Tom's original method of settling his debts of honour ; and soon after, where the roads divided, the Bosby contingent parted company with the two friends.

"I'll tell you what," said Parkes, when he and Murray had gone some distance together, "old P-Peters is at the b-b-bottom of this."

"Why do you think so ?"

"B-because somebody must be, and there's no one else c-could do it."

The probability of the conjecture grew stronger and stronger in Murray's mind, and caused him increasing anxiety.

"What ought we to do ?" he said, at last, "I don't want to spoil the old man's game, but I am bound to tell the committee what I know."

"What d-do you know ? You know n-nothing ;

h-hold your tongue and lie low—you'll see some f-un.
It's t-time to g-give advice wh-en you're asked for it.
You m-mark my words; we shall have old P-Peters
b-back again b-before N-ovember."

CHAPTER XIV.

PETERS had removed the old mare's fore-shoes and was paring her feet with his knife, when his wife came and told him Mr. Marshall had called to see him.

Besides Sam, the Vicar was the only visitor he cared to see. Others who came to enquire after his health were received with so little cordiality they seldom cared to repeat their visit.

"How are you, my good friend?" said Mr. Marshall, as Peters came into the room, "I'm very sorry to hear from Sam that you are out of sorts, but I cannot say I am surprised to hear it. I want you now to listen to me for a little, and not to be offended by anything I say. You are fretting over this business, and your heart is ill at ease. It is filled with hatred and revenge, which act like poison on your system. You know if one member suffers all suffer. You have been hardly treated, but there is the old rule, 'do as you would be done by.' Let us try now and work that out together, not fighting and pulling this way and that, like two dogs over a bone, but really arguing, as Plato says, like two hounds working together on a drag, now one of them hitting off the scent, now the other, till they get up to their fox."

"Where does Mr. Plato hunt?" asked the old huntsman, struck by the force of the simile.

"He was a Greek philosopher who lived more than two thousand years ago."

"Greek field-officer was he? Well, he knew more

about it than most of 'em ; he ought to have been a huntsman. It's common sense that is, whoever said it. Hunting is in the head—in the man's head—in the dog's head. Look at old Galloper's head !—I should like Mr. Plato to have seen that head."

"You're quite right, Peters, and Plato had as fine a head as ever a man had ; but there is one thing a dog could have taught him, which he didn't know. Have you ever noticed that when you hit a dog on one cheek he turns the other to you ?"

"Well, I never hits 'em—I'm too fond of 'm for that."

"At any rate," said Mr. Marshall, smiling, "you have seen others hit them, and you know that that is exactly what they do. Now, Mr. Plato, good as his head was, never got as far as that. It was not found out by reasoning, although it is easy enough to reason about it when you know of it ; and there's another thing we know now, that is, that we have a soul, which dogs haven't got."

"I'm not so sure but what Galloper has," said Peters, shaking his head by way of objecting to the Vicar's argument.

"Very well, Peters, if you like to think so. Now our souls are divine ; they are, as it were, a part of God, and immortal, and as partaking of the infinite, Peters, are equal—equal in the sight of God. And the soul in the body is like a light inside a bottle—all the same lights, but different bottles—and all you have to think of, Peters, is to keep your own bottle clean and give the light a chance. It's not our fault if the glass happens not to be very good, but it *is* our fault if we don't make the best of it. And a little milk is a very good thing to clean it with—the milk, Peters, of human kindness."

"I know, sir," said Peters, as the Vicar paused, "I know if you were in my place you would act very different from me ; and I knows whenever you go away I always

vows as I'll never run riot any more ; but somehow when I says to myself 'Ware riot, Peters ; 'ware riot !' it ain't no use, and I goes off just the same as ever."

Mr. Marshall, thinking he had preached enough for the time being, turned the conversation to recent events.

"What do you think," said he, "of the Whiston Wood mystery ?"

"Just what I should expect when people takes to hunting what knows nothing about it. There's Mr. Spinks—he's all right, and would do well enough ; but that Capting ain't no good, and nothing will persuade me that it's for the good of the Hunt to have him at the head of it, and what I cares for is the good of the Hunt. Poor old Simpson ! I can't help laughing. O lor' ! Sam tells me he didn't know Galloper when he got home !" and Peters lay back in his chair and laughed heartily at the scene his imagination conjured up. "I can't help laughing ! And the bitches under the bed !" and he went off into another fit of merriment. "I only hope it hasn't hurt the hounds !" he added, wiping the tears from his eyes.

The Vicar could not help joining in the laugh.

"It won't hurt Simpson," he said, "as Mr. Spinks has paid him for more than he lost ; and his wife soon got over her fright ; but the most mysterious part of the whole story is his nocturnal visitor. No one can make anything of it. Simpson tells a different tale every time, and I believe has by this time really persuaded himself that it was an apparition from some other world. His latest is that the ghost was dressed all in white and had a sepulchral voice ; his horse had wings and eyes that blazed with fire ; and that they vanished in a cloud of smoke, with a voice like the report of a gun. He certainly enjoys vastly the sense of his increased importance. I'm glad to see you laugh, Peters ; I think my visit has cheered you up."

So saying, the worthy man rose to leave the cottage.

As he passed down the garden he remarked : "I wonder you don't begin to put things to rights here. A little digging would be occupation for you."

"It would," said Peters, "and I've been thinking the last day or two of doing a little. I ain't quite made up my mind, but I've got my spade out, and shall very likely begin in a day or two."



As the Vicar went towards the village it made him happy to think that he had helped a fellow creature a little way along the right road.

At the door of the wheelwright's cottage, he met Miss Bond and Lord Unwin.

"So you've been to see old Smither ; how good of you ! How is he to-day ?

"He is suffering great pain, I am sorry to say," Miss Bond replied ; "he sits there holding his foot in his two hands, crying 'God bless my poor foot ! God bless my poor foot !' and it makes my heart ache to hear him. And between the paroxysms of pain his face lights up and his eyes twinkle with fun, as if he had everything in the world to be thankful for. Lord Unwin is so kind, he carried some things for him all the way from Spetchley ! Papa will insist on sending him his best cigars, and I'm not sure it's wise, as it must make him dissatisfied with his own tobacco ; but it is quite delightful to see how he enjoys them. The dear old man is so patient !"

"It is indeed wonderful," said the Vicar, silently invoking a blessing on the ministering angel, "to see how patiently these people bear their sufferings, and how grateful they are to anyone who shows them the smallest kindness."

"I am afraid," said Lord Unwin, "they are not always as grateful as they might be ; but he would be a churl indeed who could be ungrateful to Miss Bond."

"Perhaps many of us," said the Vicar, "are not as grateful as we should be, but my experience is that those whom we are too apt to call the lower classes dislike being patronised as much as you or I, but never fail to appreciate charity that is without ostentation."

"I am sure there is no ostentation on my part," Miss Jessie cried ; "I only feel how differently I should behave in their place. Of course, such depth of poverty is a revelation to me. One reads of it and forgets it. In America there is nothing like it—in the big cities, no doubt, there is great distress, but in the country, want of food and the actual necessities of life is unknown. Fancy, Mr. Marshall, what he was telling us this morning : Last

winter, when he was ill and couldn't work for so long, and his club money was exhausted, he went to Mr. Mould—the poor-law guardian—for outdoor relief. He was not complaining; he seemed rather to think it a good joke. Well, Mr. Mould asked him what he had done with all his money. 'All what money?' said Smither. 'I suppose you've been earning something all your life,' replies Mr. Mould. 'Yes, sir,' says Smither, 'take it all the year round I suppose I've made about twelve shillings a week.' And Mr. Mould asked him what he had done with it; and Smither said—and I'm sure his eye twinkled when he said it—'What would *you* do with it? There's the rent, half-a-crown a week, and put aside a shilling a week for clothing, and five shillings for food, and then there's the candles, and the soap, and the blacking, and the soda, and the doctor's physic—to say nothing of a glass of beer and a bit of baccy.' And would you believe it, Mr. Marshall, the man said he couldn't do anything for him. If it hadn't been for Mr. Johnson he would have had to go to the workhouse! How I should like to take him to Spetchley, give him a big hot bath, a clean linen shirt, a nice suit of clothes, silk socks, and comfortable slippers, and a good dinner, and after that set him in an armchair in front of the fire and read him an exciting novel!"

"Your enthusiasm, Miss Bond, is delightful," said Lord Unwin; "but I am afraid your guest would feel very awkward in such a novel position."

"I don't agree with you at all, if by 'awkward' you mean 'embarrassed'; I believe old Smither would always behave like a duke. Don't you think so, Mr. Marshall?"

"I am sure," said the Vicar, in answer to her appeal, "that you would be charmed by his manners; but unless you gave him his saw and his spoke-shave, and let him do an honest day's work, he would soon complain that he

was tired of a gentleman's life. Our ideas of happiness depend a great deal on what we have been accustomed to ; they are more or less comparative."

"I don't believe," said Miss Bond excitedly, "that is an axiom of Christianity. Only yesterday evening I was in Tilton's cottage when one of his boys came in from his work. 'He left home at six o'clock in the morning, and had had nothing but a bit of bread and cheese since breakfast. His mother gave him his supper, a great hunk of bread and a bowl of the weakest, greasiest-looking cocoa. I'm not squeamish, but I could not touch such stuff. When he had finished that his mother said : 'Bertie, there's a bit of apple-pudding ; will you have it now, or for breakfast to-morrow ?' The boy hesitated a few seconds, and then said, 'I'll keep it, mother, for to-morrow morning' ! Where is the comparative happiness of starvation ! You, Mr. Marshall, are consistent ; you spend your whole life in doing good to others ; but what do I give ?—my father's cigars and a few jellies that I don't even make myself, and that don't cost me a farthing ! My religion is a sham !"

"But forgive me," she went on, changing in a moment from earnestness to gaiety, "I am usurping your province. I have done preaching. Come back with us to Spetchley. We have a croquet party this afternoon. Lord Unwin and I have challenged all Bosby."

"I cannot come this moment," said the Vicar, as he took Miss Bond's hand in his ; "but I shall be delighted to walk over with my sister this afternoon, and to take another lesson from you, my dear young lady—this time in croquet.

"Ah ! Miss Bond," said Lord Unwin, as soon as they were alone, "you little know how worthless you make me feel. I don't know why I bother you with my confidences ; perhaps it is because I have never known

anyone to whom I cared to look for sympathy. There is something sympathetic about you, and I believe you would understand me better and make allowances for me if you knew how I have been brought up. My mother died when I was quite a child; I have not the slightest recollection of her. My father was always away from home, and left me entirely to the charge of servants. At school I learned more wickedness than anything else, and after I left school there was no one to check my extravagance or keep me from the temptations that were thrown in my way. My father, who is fond of me in his own peculiar way, thought he showed his affection by supplying me with as much money as I could spend. The result was, that when I came of age I found the family estates so hopelessly involved that, to save him from ruin, I had to cut off the entail. Little good it has done him or me! The poor old man is wretched enough now; but it is not too late for me, Miss Bond, to turn over a new leaf, and do something worthy of a name which ranks among the oldest and most honoured in the history of England. Don't say anything," he continued, seeing his companion about to speak; "I would rather you took no notice of what I have said. I forgot myself; but it has done me good. I beg you will forget what I have told you."

After this the conversation turned to lighter topics, and they presently reached Spetchley, where they spent the rest of the morning setting out the hoops upon the fresh-mown lawn.

"Missed! I'm so sorry," said the Vicar, during the afternoon, to Mrs. Spinks, who was his partner in a close and exciting game, "nothing can prevent his lordship winning now."

"Never despair," she replied, laughing; "there's no knowing, I may get a chance yet."

Lord Unwin was on the point of making the winning stroke when a messenger came across the lawn and handed him a telegram. He opened it, and read:—

“Ostende. The Earl of Winterfield died this morning.”

“This is a sad ending to our game,” he said, in a low voice, as he wished Miss Bond good-bye; “I will ask you to be my partner again when I return.”

There was no more croquet that afternoon; the party was broken up, and the guests took an early departure.

“Jessie,” said Mrs. Spinks, taking the girl’s arm and going out into the garden, “I want to have a word with you before I go.”

They went down the garden arm in arm.

“Isn’t it sad about Lord Unwin,” said the girl, as if she knew what it was her companion wanted to say to her.

“What do you think of him, Jessie?”

“What do I think of him? Nothing at all. I’m sorry for him because he seems unhappy.”

“You pity him, Jessie; beware of him! he is clever and unscrupulous, and means to take advantage of your good nature. You think you can treat all men with the same unguarded, unsuspecting, open-hearted friendliness, but in this country you will be misunderstood—don’t give him a chance of misunderstanding you.”

“But,” exclaimed the girl, not pretending to be ignorant of her friend’s meaning, “it is impossible he could misunderstand me! Have I treated him otherwise than I would have treated any gentleman that my father asks to the house? He dare not abuse our hospitality! Marry Lord Unwin! If he were the Prince of Wales, and had a million a year, it couldn’t make the slightest difference, because—Oh! can’t you guess?”—and she threw her arms round Mrs. Spinks. “Come now,” she said, releasing her friend, “let us go back to the house. We have talked enough for the present.”

CHAPTER XV.

It was more than a week before the hounds were sufficiently recovered from their surfeit, and the physic subsequently administered, to leave the kennels.

On the evening of the eighth day after the catastrophe in Simpson's yard, Sam, carrying an old side-saddle that had lain for years in a loft above the kennel-stables, hurried down to tell Peters that the hounds were to meet at "Wildred's Castle" the next morning.

"Wildred's Castle" has been a ruin for centuries. The dismantled walls are overgrown with ivy, while here and there an ash or fir has taken root in the crevices of the massive masonry; in what was the banqueting hall now stands a sturdy oak, and many a fox curls himself in what was once the chimney corner of "my lady's boudoir." Where valiant knight and courtly dame have stepped, the daisy and the dandelion face the sky. At one angle of the ruin stands a tower, less dilapidated than the rest. It is called "The Bride's Tower"; and the local guide still points it out to the stranger, and tells his tale with superstitious awe. The legend, which is more credible than most of its kind, runs as follows:—

"High revel was held in the Castle. Wildred, the last of the barons of Bosby, had returned from the East with his youthful bride, whose beauty rivalled the stars of her native skies. The torches that blazed along the wall grew dim to those who gazed in wonder on her face;

the lustre of the jewels which glittered as they rose and fell upon her breast, or flashed amidst the folds of her flowing robes, waned in the light of her eyes, veiled though these were by the soft fringe of their lashes. She sat at the right hand of the happy bridegroom ; on his left sat Conrad, his brother-in-arms, renowned for knightly deeds in Palestine. Of all the guests he alone was silent and morose, for in his heart a guilty passion did battle with his oaths of chivalry.

“ Loud shouts arose as Wildred called upon his friends and vassals to pledge their fealty to himself and to his lady. ‘ Rise, Conrad,’ he cried, ‘ and join us in draining a goblet to the “ Pearl of the East.” ’

“ Conrad rose sullenly, as Wildred raised the chalice to his lips. Then suddenly, as a star shoots athwart the sky, there was a flash of steel in the air, and with a groan the last Baron of Bosby fell lifeless to the ground.

“ The murderer, stepping across the prostrate body, was about to plunge the dagger dripping with the husband’s blood into the breast of his bride—and doubtless he could have done so, for every hand was for the moment paralysed by the suddenness of the ghastly deed—but either repenting of his cruelty, or convinced on the instant of the hopelessness of his base desires, he turned the pointed steel against himself, and crying ‘ To the Pearl of the East,’ fell at her feet, bathing her bridal robes in the torrent of his blood.

“ The same night an heir was born to the broad lands of Bosby. The widowed mother held her new-found comfort to her breast, and from that lifeless source there yet flowed life to that which now alone could make life dear.

“ Her maidens heard her crooning to it some strange song, but never a word she spake to them, nor gave a

sign. She knew naught of all around her save the babe, for which alone she lived. Alas ! a sudden fear awakes within her sadly-loving eyes—the little lips grow cold—the rose-bud fingers cease to press—the child lay lifeless on her broken heart.

“ Without a word she let them take it from her, and wandering listlessly from place to place, she roamed by night and day the silent woods, with hands outstretched, as if she sought her child.

“ One dark and stormy night she was seen to leave the Tower, to which she never returned. Whether she sank beneath the stream, or found some other resting-place, there is none can tell ; but still, they say, when wreaths of mist float down the dusky glades, her spirit glides with outstretched hands beside the stream.”

At the time Joey took the Bosby Hounds the ruins and the adjoining lands had been for many years in the hands of an absentee landlord, who was content to reap his septennial harvest of faggots and saplings without troubling himself to visit or improve his estate. The shooting was rented by “ the Hunt,” and the pheasants and rabbits had lately been once or twice in the daytime startled from their sense of security by the approach of guns and beaters ; but as the natives of the locality were superstitious, and the game scarce, not even the most inveterate poacher thought it worth while to venture after dark within the haunted precincts. A sluggish stream wound through the large woods that surrounded the Castle. On both sides high banks over-hung the dark water, and the bridges by which it could be crossed, save for a fallen tree or a plank placed here and there by the wood-cutters, were few and far between. Moreover, the frequent turns of the stream formed such a labyrinth, that a stranger wishing to reach the further side on horse-back would be puzzled to find his way without a guide.

It was getting dark when Peters rode over one of these bridges, and reached a spot on the bank of the stream half-way between that and the next bridge. Here he threw down a spade, dismounted, and hitched his mare's rein over the broken branch of a tree. Then, taking off his coat, he began to dig. The ground was full of roots, and for some time he made little progress ; at length, however, his purpose became apparent. He was making a trench from the top of the bank down to the level of the water. Often he stopped, straightened his back, and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"It's for the good of the hounds," he said to himself ; "I shouldn't do it if it weren't for the good of the hounds."

As it grew darker he lit a lantern, and, placing it on a twisted root in the face of the bank, resumed his digging. He now made rapid progress, as he had got below the roots that encumbered the surface, and he shovelled away, throwing the earth merrily down the stream.

When he had finished the trench he proceeded to collect a heap of dried ferns and brambles, which he placed on one side, close to where he had been working.

"Hulloa, P-Peters !" exclaimed a voice from among the hazels on the opposite bank.

Peters jumped as if he had been shot, and the lantern which he had just lifted fell with a fizz into the water.

"Lor ! Mr. Parkes, how you frightened me ! What brings you here ?"

"I c-came to look for a knife I left here when I was f-ishing a f-ew weeks ago. How did you know it was me ?"

"By your voice," said Peters, wondering how he could possibly ask such a question.

"And w-hat b-brings you here ?"

"Well," Peters began, and then paused to invent a

plausible explanation, "you see, Mr. Marshall advised me to do a little digging, and I always tries to follow his advice."

· "He will b-be very glad to hear you have f-ollowed it."

· "Now, Mr. Parkes, you're not going to tell him?"

"Wh-y not?"



"Because he wanted me to dig in my garden ; now, I haven't the heart to dig in that garden. Oh ! Mr. Parkes, its for the good of the hounds, I do assure you ; it's only for the good of the hounds. If Mr. Marshall knew anything about them hounds I'd tell him ; but he don't, and

nobody knows what I've suffered. There's no one I can talk to about 'em now Mr. Johnson's gone. I don't think I shall live long like this. There's something inside gnawing away at me night and day, and I says to myself, 'Peters,' I says, 'you must save them hounds before you die !' "

With this he began to grope with his spade for the lantern which he presently recovered from the bottom of the stream.

"I thought I should f-ind you t-rying to save the hounds," said Parkes, resuming the conversation.

"How did you come to think of looking for me here?" Peters asked, beginning to fear that his only chance lay in taking his discoverer into his confidence.

"On the p-principle of set a thief to c-catch a thief."

"Then, sir, I hope you will remember there's honour among thieves."

"I say, Peters," said Parkes, evading a direct reply, "have you paid Simpson for the hounds' breakfast the other day?"

"It weren't my fault if they ate his calf and his cutlets. I only told him to leave a few sheep-sk——"

Peters stopped abruptly, seeing he had given himself away completely; then, throwing down the spade and lantern, and extending his hands in a beseeching attitude, went on:

"'Tain't no good denying it; you know all about it as well as I do. I know I have no business here, playing this game, but—Mr. Parkes, tell me honestly—if you were in my place, wouldn't you do the same?"

"It's all very f-ine, Peters, but if so happens I'm n-not in your p-place; but honestly, if I d-did p-lay the game, I d-don't think you would c-catch me at it."

"That's true, sir; I allow I was making too much noise; but I was thinking everyone would be afraid of the spirit."

"I expect you're not afraid of th-is spirit," said Parkes, taking a flask from his pocket and throwing it on to the opposite bank. "Try to exorcise it, your feet must be wet, and you m-usn't c-catch c-cold."

Peters went down on his knees and groped about among the leaves, but had to light a match before he found the flask. Then, seating himself on the bank opposite his companion, with his feet dangling over the stream, he took the tin cup from the bottom of the flask and poured out some of its precious contents.

"Now, Mr. Parkes, before I drink your health, I want to know, 'Is it peace?'"

"Wh-at have I to do with y-our affairs, Peters? As far as I am concerned you may d-dig here or anywhere else as m-uch as you like."

"But how about Mr. Murray and the Committee?"

"My dear P-Peters, you needn't b-be alarmed, I am not one of the C-Committee, and have n-othing to d-do with the Hunt or any one c-connected with it, except yourself, who have t-taught me all I kn-ow about hunting. So, by the s-soul of G-Galloper, I swear to d-do what I c-can for the g-good of the hounds—and there's my hand!"

As their hands, stretch them as far as they could, were still fifteen feet apart, the grip was only imaginary; but it was none the less affecting and reassuring to the old huntsman.

"Thank you, Mr. Parkes, thank you!" he said, and then added doubtfully, "I suppose you couldn't manage to keep the Capting from coming too close here to-morrow morning?"

"You needn't w-orry about that. It's a thousand to one against his c-coming through here. Just throw your spade over; if I c-cut away the b-bank where it overhangs a b-bit just here, it won't make any d-difference

to the C-Capting, and I shall b-be doing you a g-good turn at the same time. There," he said, as he shovelled away the rotten edge of the bank, "it's easy enough to g-get down now. Is the b-b-bottom sound?"

"Sound as a rock, and only two foot of water!"

"Then f-inish the wh-iskey, and ch-ch-chuck back the flask. It's time all honest c-cub-hunters were in b-bed."

"One word, sir," said Peters, as his friend turned to depart, "if you happen to see an elderly gentlewoman out with the hounds you needn't worry yourself to find out who she is, or where she comes from."

"All right, P-Peters, only t-take care she's not t-too g-good-looking, or Mr. Spinks will be w-anting an introduction!"

CHAPTER XVI.

SOON after daybreak the hounds were thrown off at Wildred's Castle.

In Lord Unwin's absence Crichton was forced to seek assistance elsewhere. "I'm hanged," he said to Parkes, "if I know how to draw this place, the coverts are all so exactly alike, and as for that beastly stream, if they find and go away the other side it will take me a week to find a bridge. Which way had I better draw?"

"You had b-better begin this end and go straight through. D-dont g-go too quick, as there is a lot to d-draw, and the lying is very good. The h-ounds won't g-go into the brambles if you h-urry them."

"Eleu, into covert! Eleu, in Gaudy!" cried Crichton, and "tootled" his horn. At the same moment Peters trotted along a ride which went down to the stream at right angles to the one which Crichton was following.

The latter, hearing some one trotting behind him, looked back over his shoulder. "Who's that sporting old gal?" he asked.

"I d-didn't see one," replied Parkes, rejoiced that he was able to give a truthful answer to the question.

"Yoicks, push him up! Have at him, my beauties," Crichton cried, once more giving his undivided attention to his hounds.

Meanwhile, Peters—there being no one in sight—had turned into the thicket, and was pushing his way among the hounds. "Here, Gaudy, good bitch!" he

whispered. She pricked her ears and came straight to him. "Here, Marksman, Rambler, Fencer, Comus, Vivid, Promise, Bertha, Ravager, Bounty, Woodbine." In and out he twisted, keeping his head low, and whistling softly as hound after hound answered to his name and fell into the ranks. Galloper was the last hound he overtook. He was on the line of a fox, and would have opened in another minute. At the sound of his old



master's voice he looked up, and the next instant bounded almost to the saddle-bow, and Peters bent to meet his trusty friend's caress. Crichton could be heard 'yodotting' some distance behind, so Peters rode straight to the place where Parkes had found him digging. He pulled up to count his hounds; "Eighteen and a half, that'll do."

So saying, he persuaded the old mare to drop carefully into the stream, and in another second was on the top of the further bank. Here, as he stopped a moment to throw the brambles into the trench, and to make sure that he was not followed, he heard Crichton's voice coming faintly through the wood. Then, putting his mare into a canter, and whistling quietly to the hounds, he soon left Wildred's Castle and its visitors far behind.

"Where are the hounds?" said Crichton, surprised at their unusual silence.

"Th-ere's one of them" said Parkes, pointing to a puppy who had evidently lost himself, and was delighted to find that he was not quite alone; "and th-ere's another."

This was one of the new draft, who had not been seduced by the attractions of the strange woman.

"I say, Crichton," said Joey, as he rode up, "where are the hounds?"

"In covert I suppose; where do you expect them to be?"

"It's all right if they are in covert, but I haven't seen any of them for some time."

"There's half a dozen of them at any rate" said Crichton, as some of the rest of the new draft appeared, looking for their lost companions.

The second whip came up, and said there were no hounds back.

"Then they must be for'ard" said Joey, "ride on and see if you can see anything of them."

Crichton now began to blow his horn. He blew long and loud. Five—six—seven—eight. Any more? Nine—any more? He blew louder and longer, but not another hound appeared.

The horsemen gazed at one another in blank astonishment. "Where are they, Parkes?" cried Joey, in pleading tones.

"Your wh-ip says they're for'ard" Parkes replied. Whereupon they all set spurs to their horses and galloped for'ard as hard as they could go. Presently they met the whip coming back. He had seen nothing of them. The first whip was out in the meadow; no hounds had been near him.

"They must have crossed the river," said Murray, "and given us the slip."

"H-ow is it we didn't hear them?" questioned Parkes.

"Where's the bridge?" cried Joey; "which is the way to the nearest bridge?"

Some galloped on, others galloped back. It was the tale of Whiston Wood over again. They met, parted, and met again, and could find no trace of the vanished hounds.

The ground was hard, as there had been no rain for weeks, and Peters was careful to avoid any spot that might have betrayed his flight; but, for that matter, had the ground been soft, it would have been so cut up by their own horses, that they could not have distinguished the track of the fugitive. So when at last they brought their eyes to the ground they found it hopeless to attempt to detect the hound's footprints.

"Listen!" said Joey, who was standing in his stirrups, holding his horse's mane, with his mouth open and his head on one side. "Stand still, do stand still! I hear them!"

They all listened, and heard a wood-pigeon cooing mournfully from a distant tree.

"Hark! there's a holloa!" But their hopes fell when the sound resolved itself into the whistle of a locomotive. A belated cock played them the same trick. The air was alive with far-off sounds, which Joey's imagination conjured into the cry of his lost pack.

And all this time Peters was speeding onward with the hounds.

After half an hour's gallop he pulled up outside a barn, and dismounted. Raising the rack-board from its grooves he led his mare inside, and, as soon as the hounds were in the barn, replaced it and closed the doors. He then, by way of precaution, slipped a strong bar into two rings which he found on the inside of the doors, so that they could not be opened from without.

The old mare, relieved of saddle and bridle, bestowed her attention upon some fresh-cut clover, while Peters threw himself upon a heap of straw, and the hounds disposed themselves around him on the boards. Before long they were all asleep, and the only sounds in the barn were the snoring of the sleepers, and a steady munching of clover.

The farmer to whom the barn belonged was named Hutchins. He was his own landlord and a bachelor, and, as agriculture was not unprofitable in those days, was very comfortably off.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, when Peters and the hounds were still sound asleep, he happened to notice that the barn-doors, which he had purposely left open for the sake of the clover, had been closed, and as he approached the barn was much surprised at being greeted by the united vociferations of the incarcerated pack.

"Who's in there?" he shouted, trying to make himself heard above the din. "Open the door!"

Peters, who was busily engaged putting himself to rights, vouchsafed no answer before he had carefully arranged his veil over the upper part of his face. Then, silencing the hounds by one or two gentle applications of the whip, and imitating as well as he could the intonation of his assumed sex, he besought Hutchins, who was doing his best to force an entrance, to be careful what he was about, or the dogs would eat him. From the conversation that ensued Hutchins learned little, but the dulcet tones of the

maiden's voice, which were considerably assisted by the muttered growlings of her four-footed companions, succeeded in exciting him to a high pitch of curiosity. At length the maiden yielded to his entreaties, and with many cautions to take care of himself and not to let the dogs escape opened the door just wide enough to allow him to slip in, and closed it quickly as soon as he was inside.

The barn was dark, and for some time Hutchins, coming out of the strong sunlight, could see nothing at all; and when his eye had become accustomed to the subdued light, being very short-sighted, he could see very little of Peters, who had got into the darkest corner he could find. His spectacles, which might have been of some assistance, were unfortunately not in any of his pockets.

In appearance Hutchins was anything but attractive. He had a big head, rather bald, large black whiskers, a pear-shaped body—the stalk representing his neck—and bow legs, but, like many of his kind, was wont to boast of his popularity with the sex. He and Peters were old friends, and it was his knowledge of his friend's peculiar weakness that had first suggested to the latter the idea of keeping up his disguise, and, encouraged by greater success than could have been reasonably expected, Peters now determined to befool him to the top of his bent. All enquiries as to where he lived, where he had come from, and where he was going to, he answered as vaguely as possible. He, or rather she, was a hound-dealer's daughter, and was taking some hounds down south for her father. To avoid travelling during the heat of the day, she had turned into the barn to rest for an hour or two, and had gone to sleep. She didn't know how long she had been asleep, or where she was going to stay the night, nor yet how long it would take her to get to her destination.

The vagueness of her story rather whetted the curiosity than roused the suspicions of the inveterate lady-killer, who begged her to come up to the house and partake of a little light refreshment. The lady, however, declared that she was not hungry and dared not leave the hounds entrusted to her care.



Seating herself upon a truss of hay, as much in the dark as possible, she motioned her admirer to another nearer the door, arranging matters so that a ray of light which came through a chink in the boarding passed between them and prevented the pupil of his eye becoming inconveniently dilated. In this position she began the following conversation :—

“Tell me, now that you know all about me, what’s your name ?”

“My name is Hutchins.”

"What!" she exclaimed, apparently much alarmed at the discovery, "not Mr. John Hutchins of Copley? What would father say if he knew I was in a barn with Mr. Hutchins of Copley?"

"Why, my dear, should he say anything?" asked the lady-killer, hardly hoping that his reputation was so widespread as the girl's manner seemed to imply.

"Oh dear! they tell me he's a terrible man—that no woman can withstand his fascinations."

"I assure you, miss," said the flattered farmer, "whatever reports you have heard of your friend John have been grossly exaggerated. I allow I have a fancy for a pretty face, and perhaps occasionally, under the rose, you know—but, kiss and don't tell, missie, is my way of doing things!"

"Lor! Mr. Hutchins, to hear you talk one might think you was as innocent as a new-born lamb; but one has only to look at you—Ah me!" she continued, with a sigh, "I have never allowed a man to kiss me yet, but——"

"Then, dearie, let me have the first!" murmured the enamoured swain, approaching her on his knees, with protruded lips and an expression that would have upset the gravity of a horse.

"Stay where you are, or I'll set the hounds on you."

"Just one, only one," pleaded her gallant and discreet lover, the ray of sunlight playing upon his upturned face.

"Well, if you will let me stay here till dark I don't mind if——"

"Stay here till dark! you shall stay here for a week—" The old idiot advanced upon his knees—"or for ever if you like. I've got a nice little farm, and a comfortable house for you, and a tidy bit in the funds."

The maiden permitted him to put his arm round her waist, and coily lifting her veil exposed her cheek to his salute.

"How old are you ? said Hutchins, with his arm still round her, for the first time feeling some misgiving ; but the lady only buried her face in her hands, and rocked to and fro as if in paroxysms of pain.

"Oh !" she cried, "you've put your nasty whiskers into my eye. Oh dear ! what shall I do ?" and she went on rocking harder than ever.

At last she was persuaded to allow Hutchins to see if there was anything in it. "I'm sure," she said, "you'll find something there that you don't expect to see."

Hutchins threw open the door and turned to examine the eye that his whiskers had so wantonly injured.

The girl stood with the light full on her face, holding the lids of the injured eye apart with her finger and thumb. Hutchins approached, stopped, went nearer, stopped again, and rubbed his eyes.

"You old devil !——"

The rest of his speech was lost in the clamour set up by the startled hounds.

However much Hutchins might resent the trick that had been played upon him, he could not help seeing, before long, the absurdity of the whole thing, and was soon joining heartily in the laugh against himself. On learning that his old friend had had nothing to eat since sunrise, he went into the house and reappeared with a plentiful supply of provisions ; and while replenishing his inner man, Peters related to him the history of his adventures.

"I'm blowed," said Hutchins, when the narrative had come to an end, "if it wouldn't serve you right if I went off to Mr. Spinks and told him all about it ! But you're not looking yourself ; what's the matter with you ? This working all night and getting no sleep all day will knock you up. What's the use of it ? What will it lead to ?"

"It ain't the work," replied Peters, wearily, "it's the want of it as is killing me. If I can carry on I shall get rid of that 'Captin', and then maybe I shall feel better. It's very easy to talk, and say 'you ought to do this,' and 'you musn't do that,' but it all depends how you're made. I ain't constitooted that way, and I don't mean to try and alter my constitootion. I'm too old, and what's more I've gone too far to turn back."

"But you will be found out," urged his friend. "What is there to prevent them going to your cottage now and finding that you're not there?"

"My missus will see to that; nobody won't get into the house as long as she's in the doorway?"

"But how are you going to carry it on, as you say? You are bound to be caught sooner or later."

"That's just the difficulty," said Peters, laying his hand on the farmer's knee and looking anxiously into his face. "I have a trick or two in my head, but I want someone to help me. That's why I came here."

"And made a fool of me!" said Hutchins, recollecting his late folly; "but come, old friend, tell me what I can do for you; you wont find me such a darned old idiot when it comes to business."

When they left the barn the sun was sinking in the west; the rooks circling above the lofty elms, the pigeon speeding homeward with well-filled crop, the smoke rising straight from the farm chimney in the still atmosphere, and a subtle savour of tripe and onions preparing for Hutchins' supper, combined to give the idea of peace and plenty.

It was time for Peters to be getting home. The hounds, glad to escape from their prolonged confinement, crowded round him as he mounted, and followed him with demonstrations of joy as he led them towards the neighbouring covert.

At a sign from his hand they bounded into the wood and deployed like skirmishers through the thick undergrowth. "Hark to him!" cried Peters, as Vanguard threw his bell-like tongue. "Hark to him! it's the old grey-back for a sovereign!"

As he spoke an old dog-fox slipped quietly into the ride not twenty yards from him, and with a wave of his brush, and a wink of his eye—at least, so Peters fancied—disappeared on the other side.

"Tally-ho! Tally-ho!" cried the old huntsman, and laid the clamouring pack upon the line. He stood and heard the hounds leave the wood—the old fox was no ring-runner—and listened as the cry came fainter and fainter—until it died away in the distance.

The excitement of the day was over, and his late merriment was succeeded by a sigh, as, weary in mind and body, he turned and rode slowly towards home.



"THEY BOUNDED INTO THE WOOD."—Page 124.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE will now turn back to Joey and his friends, who were left somewhere in the middle of the last chapter listening for the hounds. Several of the horsemen who came out to meet the hounds at Wildred's Castle—one or two of them being members of the Hunt Committee—had been induced to rise earlier than usual in the hope—it would be kinder, perhaps, to say on the chance—of witnessing a repetition of what had come to be known as the “Whiston Wood Mystery.” Had the new master proved successful in his second essay, they would have been among the loudest in their congratulations. As it was, they were the first to sneer at the fresh proof of his incapacity, nor were they at all particular to conceal their sneers.

“We should have done better to have stayed in bed,” said one.

“We shall have to cut fox-hunting and take to hares,” said another.

“That will be no use,” said a third; “his father cut hairs.”

“You infernal cur!” cried Joey, who had overheard what was said, turning fiercely on the last speaker. “Whatever your father was he bred a blackguard! This is the last time you, or any of you gentlemen, hunt at my expense. You can find the hounds, and hunt them in any way you please, at your own. I will have nothing more to do with you.” With which he left the field and rode off in a rage by himself.

On his way home he met Mr. Bond riding with his daughter and Miss Brain, who was staying at Spetchley. "You are surely not going home already," exclaimed the two ladies in a breath; "we had an early breakfast and have come out on purpose to find the hounds."

"No one will be more delighted than I shall be if you can find them," he replied, and then in a few words told them what had happened. The interest they evinced in the matter, and the sympathy of the two young ladies in his misfortune, went a great way to restore Joey to a right state of mind. As it was useless going on they turned and rode back with him to Bosby, the two ladies riding in front, Joey following with Mr. Bond.

"As you ask my opinion," said the latter, when they were getting near the village, "I will tell you what I think. I don't pretend to know anything about hunting, but I fancy I am a pretty fair judge of the human species, and I calculate you have been badly advised. You should never have got rid of Peters. He knows more about hunting than all of you put together, and my advice to you is to go and consult him straight."

"You are perfectly right, sir; I ought never to have got rid of him—but I can't go and consult him."

"Don't say that, my boy; remember it is not derogatory to a gentleman to ask another man's pardon, although that man may be his social inferior. What is lowering to one's sense of honour is not asking it when he ought to do so."

"Indeed, Mr. Bond, you misunderstand me. It is not the 'humble pie' that I mind, but I fear Peters might very justly refuse to accept any apology, or to give me any advice after the way I have treated him."

"You may be right, Mr. Spinks. He may be justified in refusing; but from all I have heard of the man I guess he won't do that."

Joey rode straight to the kennels and gave his horse up to Sam, saying that he was going to see Peters. There could be no doubt in Sam's mind, seeing the master's dejected air, that the stratagem had been successful, and that if Joey succeeded in getting into Peters' cottage the fraud would be immediately detected.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Spinks," he said, in the hope that he might avert such a catastrophe, "but Mr. Peters is too ill to see anyone."

The news of Peters' illness, however, had the effect of strengthening Joey's wavering resolution, and he started forthwith, leaving Sam scratching his head in deep perplexity. He walked slowly, pondering the probable manner of his reception; and it was with considerable diffidence that he knocked at length at the sick man's door.

"You can't see him," said Mrs. Peters, placing herself full in the doorway, and without waiting for Joey to speak. "He is ill."

"I am very sorry, indeed, to hear it, Mrs. Peters. Will you kindly ask him if he will see me?"

"Shan't do nothing of the sort," she replied, waxing furious. "You can come and see him when he's better—if he ever does get better!" and she glared reproachfully upon the author of her husband's sorrows.

Finding that his humble expostulations produced no effect upon the dauntless Amazon, Joey was about to retire, when Crichton, who had learned his intentions from Mr. Bond, and had followed him on horseback, came quickly through the garden gate, and accosted him without ceremony:

"Have you seen Peters?"

On hearing Peters was ill he exclaimed, "I don't believe the scoundrel is ill at all; he isn't in the house, or you would be allowed to see him. Let me pass." At the

same time he tried to force his way past Mrs. Peters into the house.

"You dare !" she cried, and taking full advantage of the height of the step on which she stood, and of her own weight, she put her hands on his chest and hurled him backwards down the path. He narrowly escaped falling, and, recovering his balance, was again returning to the attack, Mrs. Peters standing in an attitude of defiance, looking as large as a church and as ugly as a dissenting chapel, when Mr. Marshall's voice was heard exclaiming "For shame, Captain Crichton, for shame !" The Vicar said good morning to Joey, and, passing Crichton without taking the slightest notice of him, asked Mrs. Peters if he could see her husband.

"You can just look in, Mr. Marshall, but don't disturb him. He had hardly any sleep last night, and I am in hopes he may just doze off for a little."

He entered the darkened bedroom. Its occupant lay in bed with his face turned away from the door, and only the top of his head was visible. He was groaning, as if half asleep. The good old man approached, laid his hand gently on the grizzled head, placed a can of soup that he had brought with him by the bedside, and stole quietly on tip-toe from the room.

"See if you can get him to take a little of my sister's soup ; I am certain it will do him good," he said to Mrs. Peters, and then turning to Joey added, "Now, gentlemen, I think we had better go."

They went together as far as the vicarage, with but little conversation by the way.

One man is a good judge of wine ; another can tell at a glance the diamond from the paste ; another though blindfold, knows silver by the touch ; and the Vicar could instinctively, as it were, distinguish in human nature the ring of the pure metal from that of the base.

The consciousness of this kept Crichton silent in his presence, but no sooner was he alone with Joey than he began to excuse his own behaviour towards Mrs. Peters, and to accuse Joey himself of ingratitude and want of confidence.

"It is rather hard," he said, "after all the trouble I have taken for you, not to mention the expense and inconvenience I have been put to on your account, that you should go to Peters behind my back. If you wanted to get me to give up hunting the hounds, and to reinstate him, I would much rather you had told me so to my face. My position, whichever way you like to look at it, is not an enviable one. How could you possibly have seen Peters without asking him to come back? How could he possibly have helped you unless he was, as I confess I suspected, at the bottom of the whole business? That is why I tried to force my way into his house. You see the sort of woman Mrs. Peters is. How was I to tell that he was really ill in bed? Could I possibly take her word for it? I am sorry now that I tried force, because nothing has come of it; but that can't be helped. The only way now is to go on as we are, and do our best to find out what it all means. But I tell you candidly, Spinks, if you do this sort of thing again I wash my hands of the whole business. You may find a huntsman where you can, and you and the hounds may go to the devil before I move a finger to help you."

"Forgive me, my dear fellow," said Joey, taking Crichton's arm; "I am sorry I have offended you. I lost my temper this morning, and was in such a desperate state I would have done anything. Old Bond as good as told me I ought to apologise to Peters. You don't suppose it was any pleasure to me to apologise?"

"Apologise! what on earth are you to apologise for?"

Surely you can discharge a servant without tendering him an apology three months afterwards !”

“Of course I can, but I think it might have been done more kindly than it was. It was rather brutal to write that letter, without an explanation or expression of regret at parting with him. We might at least have broken it to him more gently.”

“Perhaps so, but it is too late to think about that now ; and I’m not sure after all that it is not more merciful, if you’re going to take off a man’s head, to do it in one stroke than in half a dozen. The question you have to decide is very simple. It is whether I am to remain or not ?”

“Pray do not think that. I assure you I am most grateful to you for all your kindness. I only went to Peters on the chance of his being able to get us out of the dilemma, and had no idea of doing anything that would look as if I had lost confidence in you.”

“Then it’s all right. I understand, my dear Spinks ; say no more about it. You may depend on me to pull you through somehow.”

As soon as Peters’ visitors had gone Sam emerged from the bedclothes, and, slipping out by the back door—the same way as he came—arrived at the kennels in time to hold his master’s stirrup. Neither of the whips had returned, nor was there any news of the missing hounds.

“I am afraid Peters is very ill,” said Joey, as Sam brought his horse out of the stable.

“Afraid he is,” said Sam, shaking his head solemnly. “Leastways, they seemed to think so when I was down there this morning. He certainly weren’t at all like himself. Hounds gone again, sir ?”

“Gone ? Yes !—vanished without a sound or a sign of them ! Can *you* account for it ?”

“Sperrits,” said Sam, gravely, bringing his eye round somewhere about the top of Joey’s hat.

"What do you mean by spirits?"

"Well, it was last Sunday that Mr. Marshall was preaching about them sperrits what took them blessed pigs, and I says to myself at the time, I wonder if that Wildred Castle sperrit will be playing the fool with our hounds Tuesday."



Having enunciated this startling theory, he lowered his eye with perfect gravity to Joey's face to see what effect it might have.

"Well, Sam," said Joey, smiling at his superstition, "I certainly thought the days of miracles had gone past, and can only hope the hounds are not all drowned in the brook. If either of the whips come back with any news of them, send me word at once." So saying, he started in pursuit of Crichton, who had ridden on to "The Hall."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. SPINKS was nothing if not practical. She did not profess to understand the ins and outs of fox-hunting, nor did she attempt to furnish an explanation of what had happened.

Premising that there must be a solution of the problem, she concluded that all that was wanted was the person who could solve it; and when she received a letter from Bullock, saying little about himself, but that he had not yet found another situation to suit him, and asking affectionately after Mr. Joseph and the hounds, she came without further argument to the conclusion that he was the very man for the purpose, and promptly communicated her idea to Joey.

"I agree with you, mother," he said, "that if we had not lost Bullock all this would never have happened; but I can't offend Crichton. I have already been rude to him once this morning, and after all he has done for me, and the way he spoke to me just now, I am sure he would be very much hurt if I showed any further want of confidence in him. He is no more to blame for our misfortunes than I am."

"Stuff and nonsense! What have his or anybody's feelings got to do with it. You are wasting your money and making yourself perfectly miserable, as well as ridiculous. If you have no one who can help you, you must find some one who can. I say, 'send for Bullock.' You leave it to me, and don't worry yourself any more about anybody's feelings."

Accordingly, in the middle of luncheon—the hounds naturally being the one topic of conversation—turning to Crichton, Mrs. Spinks began :

“I am thinking, Captain Crichton, of sending for Bullock to see if he can be of any use. Joey tells me he is afraid my doing so may hurt your feelings, but I cannot see how it can possibly affect you. He will not interfere with you or the hounds ; so, I suppose you can have no objection to my sending for him.”

“I don't see,” said Crichton, “what good he can do.”

“Will you tell me what harm he can do ?”

“There is the old saying, ‘too many cooks.’”

“But how about the broth ? It seems to me unless something is done very soon there will be none to spoil.”

“Of course, Mrs. Spinks, you will do what you wish without consulting me. Only I fancy while Dawkins is here you will not induce Bullock to return.”

“That difficulty is easily overcome : he will not return as my servant, but will be here as my guest and need not even see Dawkins. Come, Joey, we will write to him at once.”

So saying, she rose from the table, and, keeping Joey well in front of her, went out of the room, leaving Crichton to finish the sherry in no amiable frame of mind.

Although Bullock could do no harm as far as the hounds were concerned, and might possibly do good, anyone who would give good advice to his victim, and deliver the sheep from the shearer, was the last person Crichton desired to see at the present juncture. He more than guessed that his dislike of Bullock was reciprocated, and he had given him a prominent place on the list—by no means a short one—of those who owed him a grudge. Indeed, ever since he had been compelled to exempt Peters, it had kept on crossing his mind that Bullock

might be the author of the plot so evidently directed against himself. The more he considered the matter the more necessary it appeared to prevent his coming to Bosby.

Having come to this conclusion, he went in search of Joey, but found that he and Mrs. Spinks had gone to Spetchley; and on enquiring if there were any letters for the post, was informed that Mrs. Spinks had taken them herself. Frustrated in his intention of waylaying the letter, he went round to the stables and had a long interview with Dawkins, by whom he was persuaded that Bullock, though an excellent groom and a faithful servant, was far too "dunderheaded" to have concocted the plot of which he suspected him to be the author. Bullock, in Dawkins' opinion, was much more likely to spoil a plot than invent one.

Crichton then returned to the house, somewhat reassured by his interview with Dawkins, and, not seeing what else he could do, sat down to write to his friend Unwin, urging him to return as quickly as possible.

The balance seemed to be on the turn, and whatever weight Unwin might have would be thrown into his scale, and counteract that of Bullock in the other.

Having finished the letter, in which he set forth at length the state of affairs at Bosby, he sat biting the end of his pen, doubting whether his arguments might not have exactly the opposite effect to that which he intended, and induce his friend to remain away until the battle had been fought out, when he might safely return and join the victorious party. While thus weighing the probabilities for and against despatching the letter, a happy thought occurred to him, and he hastened to give effect to it by adding the following postscript:—

"P.S.—The young fool has just gone off to Spetchley; he had much better stay and look after his hounds than

go dancing attendance on Miss B. I can't imagine what she can see in him. The old Yankee don't seem to care whether his daughter marries a duke or a hairdresser."

"That will bring him back," he soliloquized, as he addressed the envelope, "The Right Honourable Earl of Winterfield — the 'Right Honourable' — splendid! I deserve to be a marquis! I wonder" — licking the gummed edge of the envelope — "if the old chap was better off than he made out. If there is any money I ought to get my share of it; if not" — taking the necessary postage stamps from Joey's stock — "the early bird must marry the Yankee worm. Hang it! if I had a coronet—but I can't manage the women—at least not these women. They are a deal too sharp; I leave them to Unwin."

With these reflections he sealed his letter with Joey's crest—a horse rampant, holding a pair of scissors between his fore-feet—put on his hat, and strolled down to the post office.

That night Joey and Crichton sat late in the smoking-room anxiously expecting news of the hounds. It was past 12 o'clock when there was a ring at the bell. One of the whips had come to say that the hounds had been found and were safe in the kennel. At half-past six, so his story ran, he heard them running the other side of Copley Farm. It was too dark to ride except by the road, and he had the greatest difficulty in keeping within hearing of them. They ran due south for miles, but he got up to them at last where they had thrown up in a ploughed field. They had just hit off the line again, and it was all he could do to stop them. They seemed tired, as if they had come a long way. There was not a soul with them. The other whip was still out looking for them.

Joey went to bed, thankful at least that he was not houndless.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE second day from then brought an answer from Bullock. It ran :—

“DEAR MR. JOSEPH,—I am very much concerned at what you tell me about your hounds, but think I can guess how it is done. Don't take them out again till I come, which I will next Monday, and tell everybody you are going to meet at some place Toosday morning, 7 o'clock, and we will go somewhere else at 6.30, but don't tell a soul. I would come before, but I am very busy just at present. I am thinking of setting up in the private detective line. A friend of mine wants me to join him. Don't mind about Dawkins, he will keep. Let us clear up the other business first. It was very kind of you, Mr. Joseph, to send for me, and I hopes to be able to put things straight. My dutiful respects to Mrs. Spinks.

“Your obedient

“BULLOCK.”

It soon got noised abroad that Bullock was coming down to investigate the mystery, and his advent was awaited with no little curiosity. The Monday following Sam met him at the station, and on their way to Bosby showed an unwonted readiness to answer all enquiries concerning Peters, nor was the truth of his evidence one whit shaken by the cross-examination, which continued up to the moment they reached “The Hall,”

where Joey and his mother received Bullock with open arms.

Crichton kept out of the way, and Bullock, installed in the back part of the house, was equally anxious to avoid his sworn foe.

Full of importance, Bullock set to work without delay to make enquiries in every direction. While having his lunch he took the opportunity of examining the butler and several of the servants, for, as he wisely remarked, there was no knowing where he might find a clue to the mystery. After lunch he went to the kennels, where he inspected the hounds, about which he saw nothing very peculiar, and subjected the two whips to a searching examination. After that he drew the village inn, where he was entertained with a hundred variations — each one the only authentic version — of the story. He thought it better not to see Peters before he had exhausted all other sources of information, and, as several persons had advised him to go and see Mr. Parkes, who was generally allowed to know more about the Hunt than anyone except Peters himself, he returned to "The Hall," and from there rode over to interview that gentleman. From "old Tom," however, he got very little besides a whiskey and soda and good wishes for his success, and returned home rather disappointed so far with his afternoon's work.

Peters, thanks to Sam, was not taken by surprise when Bullock called at seven o'clock in the evening. He was sitting in a high-backed chair before the fire, wrapped in a blanket, and looked desperately pale. The flickering light was not sufficient to betray the artifice of chalk and soot by which his sickly look had been obtained. By his side there was a small table on which stood a row of medicine bottles. His visitor, taking the chair placed for him by Mrs. Peters, expressed his concern at finding him

in such bad case, and lost no time in coming to the business on hand.

"To tell you the truth," he said, after they had discussed at great length the various possibilities, "before I came down here I was convinced that you were doing it all yourself, but as soon as I heard that you were actually seen in bed by Mr. Marshall at the very time the hounds disappeared, I saw that was impossible. Who is there now—just think it over again—who knows the hounds well enough to play these tricks with 'em?" Peters shook his head, and could only suggest Sam, which was absurd. "There's farmers about," said he, "what knows the hounds, but you mus'n't forget the point; the point is, the hounds don't know them, and I'm bothered if I can think of anybody but Sam. And why should I bother myself, after the way I've been treated. They come down here, and think they are going to hunt a pack of hounds, when they know nothing about hunting. Why! when them two were in the kennels I couldn't smell nothing but lilies of the valley and lavender water! How can you expect hounds to hunt foxes, when the air stinks of lavender water? There's Mr. Spinks, I suppose he has got some of it in his blood and can't help it, but that Captin ain't got no excuse of that sort."

"You're right there," said Bullock, readily joining in abuse of the Captin, "he is altogether a bad lot; but Mr. Joseph—he's different. He is that fond of sport he could learn anything. If he had only kept me," he went on, shaking his head with an air of superior wisdom, "and hadn't listened to them frauds, things would have been very different."

"He gave you the sack, too, did he?" exclaimed Peters, interested to find that his visitor was a fellow sufferer; "then you must know pretty well how I feel about it all."

"I do, indeed, Mr. Peters," replied Bullock, drawing his chair closer, "and I'm not a bit surprised that you're took ill by it. It occurs to me that our interests lie pretty much about the same way—we both want to get rid of the Capting?"

Peters nodded assent, and Bullock drawing his chair still closer, went on :

"I think I shall be able to manage that before very long, and I will tell you what I am going to do meanwhile. We have given out that the hounds are going to meet at the Woolpack at 7 o'clock to-morrow, and we are going to meet at Bramston cross-roads at 6.30. What do you think of that for a dodge?"

Bullock leaned back in his chair to mark the effect of this revelation upon his listener, and waited for his answer.

"Dev'lish cute, I says. Mr. Bullock, you are a sharp 'un ! I don't know when ever I heard of anything more cuter."

Upon this Bullock and Peters laughed immoderately for some minutes, till the latter was seized by a violent fit of coughing. "Jemima," he called to his wife, in a weak voice, as he recovered from the attack, "let us have another dose of that stuff"; and then, turning to Bullock, he said, "You won't think me rude, but I don't think I ought to talk much more to-night."

His visitor took the hint and rose to go. His last words before he left the house were, "You do what you can, Peters; I don't expect you to do much, but it will surprise me if we don't do something between us."

He would have been surprised if he had seen the sick man throw off his blanket, and still more astonished to have seen him, an hour later, entering the kitchen at Copley Farm.

CHAPTER XX.

"HERE you are at last," exclaimed Hutchins, as Peters appeared; "we were just thinking something must have happened, and that you weren't coming. Let me introduce you to my nevvv—James Fulton—Mr. Peters. Jim, this is Mr. Peters, the best man that ever sat on a horse, let alone handling the hounds. My nevvv, Peters, is a member of the theatrical profession, he makes all the wigs for the best theatres and all the leading actors and actresses in town. Perhaps you remember him, he has been out with the hounds when he has been down here occasionally."

James turned his face to the light. He was a small man, a good deal younger than Peters, but about the same size and build. A luxuriant pair of red whiskers and moustaches, on which he evidently bestowed considerable care, formed the most remarkable feature of his otherwise uninteresting face. But they recalled nothing to Peters' memory.

"Don't you remember," said their owner, "giving me the fox's brush the day you killed him in the water-meadow at the bottom of the farm?"

"Lor'! was that you?" exclaimed Peters, every incident of the run flashing to his recollection; "that was the day we met at Framley; chopped a vixen in Porter's copse—and she had cubs, too, but we kept them alive. It was many a day before I got over that. Then we found a brace in the gorse field at Herfold, got on to

the dog fox, ran through Sherrington's, where he was headed by Colonel Rideabout; crossed the stream at Pockford; turned right-handed, leaving Whiston Wood on the left; brought him along at a rare pace over the heather, and ran into him at last down in the corner of the meadow yonder. I remember you now! Mr. Johnson told me to give you the brush, and I said it would make you a pair of whiskers when yours got a bit thin! You were riding a little horse, almost a pony, with a long coat, and I remember wondering how you ever got through the run."

"As a matter of fact," replied the truthful James, "I never did get through the run. I lost you soon after the prologue, and I thought, as I had no more to say in that act, that I might as well get off the stage; and I had just got home when I heard the whole troupe coming this way, and that's how I came to be in the death-scene in the last act. And when I was called before the curtain, and you handed up the brush from Mr. Johnson, I made my bow and took what was offered. I can assure you, Mr. Peters, I caused quite a sensation when I got back to our theatre. Mr. Sotheran was playing with us at the time, and he was mad about fox-hunting. He never would wear anybody's wigs but mine after that. It's hanging up in my shop now, and I always maintain it is the best advertisement a wigmaker ever set up."

"They've grown a bit since then," said Hutchins, alluding to the whiskers.

"They are coming on," said the wigmaker, stroking them with justifiable pride, "but they're not up to the mark yet. I've had to shorten the pair a bit that I've brought down for Mr. Peters, but they are very handsome notwithstanding. They are the very pair that Mr. Sotheran wore himself; he always said they were the

best-made whiskers that ever faced the footlights. The costumes, too, that I have in my portmanteau are wonderful. I got them from a friend who is the leading costumier in the trade. They are exactly identical—short drab cut-away coats (better than red ones, I thought, for our purpose)—striped flannel waistcoats—buff breeches, with fobs—top boots, mahogany tops—low-crowned hats—the hat is the only thing I'm doubtful about. Your head, I think, Mr. Peters, is a shade smaller than mine, but paper will do that. Then there are the whips, spurs, collars, and the neckties—I shouldn't forget them, one don't often set eyes on articles as sporting as the ties. The profession, believe James Fulton, knows how to turn out a fox-hunter! But, as time's getting on, it might be as well to have our dress-rehearsal."

"Supper first, James," said Hutchins, "then the play, and after that a drop of something before we go to bed."

Peters did but scant justice to the sumptuous repast placed before him. By the time he had told the story of Bullock's cuteness, and they had done laughing over it, his appetite had gone, and for the rest of the meal he sat listening in a dazed kind of way to the incessant theatrical jargon of the wigmaker. His interest, however, revived when, after supper, the portmanteau was brought out, and its contents assorted into the two suits already described. Each article in turn was held up to the light, and examined by Peters with an expression of growing misgiving and alarm, by the wigmaker with increasing pride and delight; and, the examination over, they proceeded to divest themselves of their outer garments and assume the sporting habiliments severally allotted to them.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Peters, looking down at the breeches he had just put on, "there are a dozen buttons and three of them above my knee. And I'm

blow'd if the boots ain't got heels in the middle of the soles like a blessed Frenchman. Young man, you've got your spurs on upside down ! ”

“ Have I ? ” said James ; “ I'll soon put that right.” And he hastened to take off the spurs and turn them right way up.

“ And now you've got the buckles inside ! Have you brought the thongs ? ”

“ Is this what you mean ? ” asked James, who had got his spurs right at last, drawing forth from the portmanteau two elaborately-twisted red and gold hat-guards. “ No ? Then they haven't sent them.”

“ Lor' a mussy ! to think that I should have come to this ! ” said Peters, and between laughing and crying the tears overflowed down his cheeks.

“ Cheer up, old man,” said Hutchins, who saw the strain was beginning to tell on his old friend's health. “ Pull yourself together ; you've got to go through with it. James, bring out the whiskers.”

Before Peters knew what had happened the springs closed upon his face and he and the wigmaker stood side by side as like as the twins which their own mother couldn't tell apart.

“ Demme,” cried Hutchins, holding his sides for laughing, “ if you aren't as like as two periwinkles ! ”

“ All I can say is,” remarked Peters, as he surveyed his costume with woeful disgust, “ I never looked such a darned old fool before in all my life.”

The wigmaker who fancied himself not a little in his sporting get up, failed to see how Peters could look a darned fool if they were both so exactly alike, and as he had procured the costumes from the most eminent costumier in London, and was assured by that authority that they were perfect to a point as supplied to the first actors of the day, was annoyed that his discrimination

and experience in such matters were not properly appreciated.

"Confound it!" he said, shooting his linen, and striking an attitude that he had picked up from behind the scenes, "I think I look dev'lish sporting! Now, uncle, let us get on with the business. You have to holloa—mind you make yourself heard."

"Wait a minute," said Peters, interrupting; "I want to get you to understand exactly what you have to do. You have got to keep as far away from the horsemen as you can, and let no one see you—you understand? You must keep your ears open as well as your eyes, and if you hear the hounds coming your way get away from them as quick as you can. When they turn, you turn—you see? That is all you've got to think about till you hear Hutchins holloa; and when you hear him holloa, get to him as quick as your horse will take you. Now, Hutchins, let's hear you halloa."

For the life of him, Hutchins couldn't make a sound. Every time he opened his mouth, his eye caught Peters' red whiskers and he went into convulsions. Eventually he had to go into the passage outside, where he recovered himself, and presently emitted the most frightful noise that ever issued from a human throat. In the whole course of nature nothing could be found like it, and it had, therefore, the necessary qualification of being unmistakable.

"That'll do," said the wigmaker, "that's my cue; trust me to come on at the right moment; I have not mixed with the *élite* of the profession all these years for nothing."

"Did you hear me?" asked Hutchins as he re-entered.

"Yes, uncle, I heard you—but look here, if by any chance I don't turn up exactly to the minute you will have to gag a bit you know."

"All right, my boy. I think you will find your uncle equal to the occasion."

Peters sat down and began to change his clothes.

"Poor old Galloper!" he said as he pulled off the high-heeled boots. "He knew me when I was a woman, but hang me if he will have anything to say to me got up like this," and with the back of his hand he brushed a tear from his cheek.

Hutchins was right. The strain was too much for him, body and mind, and the sickness he had feigned was in reality taking hold of him.

CHAPTER XXI.

As day dawned the three men started on horseback from Copley Farm on their way to Bramston cross-roads.

Peters had painted a white blaze down his mare's forehead, and a white stocking on her off hind leg, which caused a resemblance to the bay mare that the wigmaker bestrode sufficient to defy a closer scrutiny than they were likely to meet with.

They rode together until they came to the brow of a hanger, overlooking a succession of low hills, covered with heather and bracken, and divided by green glades, which, diverging from the north, opened into the enclosed and more cultivated parts of the country.

The oak-scrub on the sides of the hills lay dimly visible in the misty shadows, while along the warm ridges bright touches of golden fern glittered in the level rays of the sun, and fir-trees threw long lines across the ruddy heath. And further eastward ridge beyond ridge rose delicately pencilled in softest silver, the furthest how softly and yet how clearly traced against the liquid sky !

The prospect eastward seems, as it were, a scene in Fairyland — the land of imagination. It is Youth's vision of the future expanding in the light of Hope, beautiful, mysterious, immeasurable, enchanting and filling with delight. Turn westward, it is the retrospect of bygone years, still beautiful, but mysterious no longer, uncompromising and distinct.

"You see that meadow," said Peters, drawing the

wigmaker's attention to a treacherous strip of verdure that lay immediately below the hill on which they were standing; "mind you look where we cross and keep well to the headland, or you'll get bogged; and mind, if anyone comes this way, you don't let him see you." With these last instructions he and Hutchins left their companion among the trees on the hanger.

"Do you think they are going to draw this way," said Hutchins, after they had been standing on the top of one of the ridges for some time in expectation of the arrival of the hounds.

"They'll come this way, if they come here at all."

"Hark! there they are."



The sound of a horn came faintly across the hills. Peters moved towards the sound, and crossing over the next ridge descended into the valley beyond. The first whip was already there, but he was standing some

distance from them down the glade. Now and again they could hear Crichton's voice as he drew along the crest of the hill. Presently a cub crept stealthily from the oak-scrub, but on seeing the two horsemen turned back into the covert. A bend in the ride concealed him from the whip. Hutchins opened his mouth and drew a full draught of the morning air into his lungs.

"Stop, you old idiot!" said Peters, seeing what he was up to; "you'll have your red-headed nevvie down on us. Hold up your hat to the whip yonder."

At the signal the whip galloped up, and his holloa soon brought Crichton and his hounds to the spot.

"Tally-ho back," cried the whip, cap in hand, cheering the pack on to their fox. As Crichton came up, Peters with a touch of the spur set his mare dancing among the hounds, and taking his feet from the stirrups, threw his arms around her neck crying "Wo! mare, wo! I shall be off; I shall be off."

"Look out where you're coming to," shouted Crichton, as he caught his knee behind the mare's pin-bone, and well-nigh dislocated his hip-joint in trying to pass.

"What the devil do you bring him here for!" he said, looking angrily at Hutchins. "Mind the hounds! By George! he'll kill one of them before he's done."

Another dexterous touch of the spur on the far side set the mare going up the lane, just as Joey, Bullock, and the rest of the small field arrived from the other direction. The next moment the hounds hit off the scent, and went back up the hill followed by the horsemen.

"Rather close quarters, that, Hutchins," said Peters, settling himself in the saddle, "a deal too close to be pleasant. Let's get up the hill and hear what they are doing."

There was a good scent and the hounds rattled the cub up and down the hills and along the valleys for the

best part of an hour, before he made up his mind to essay the open. Peters, who had been keeping out of



the way, presently saw the hounds streaming across the boggy meadow and up the hanger, pointing straight for

the wigmaker. Several of the horsemen were close behind them. It was an anxious moment.

"John," he exclaimed, as the hounds checked on the top of the hanger, "I'm blowed if he hasn't headed him."

And surely enough the hounds swung to the left, and came down the hill, across the meadow at the further end, and back to the place where they found. Round, and round again, up and down went the fox, and hounds and huntsmen followed as before.

The steep hills began to tell on the horses, and they were thankful for a check.

"What did I tell you, Mr. Joseph?" exclaimed Bullock, who stood beside Joey watching the hounds as they made their cast.

"Wonderful, Bullock, wonderful! You have found it out; you are worth your weight in gold. Was there ever such a pack of hounds? What do I not owe you? Look, there it is—for'ard, for'ard," and, leaning over his horse's neck, he galloped on, blowing his horn in an ecstasy.

It was not long before the cub began to run short, and the checks became more frequent. The riders, lulled to a sense of security, were sparing their horses, and not pressing so closely upon the hounds.

"Now's our chance," said Peters, as the cub, dragging his brush, passed close by where he and Hutchins were standing. "Look out; here they come!"

The hounds came steadily down the hill. There was no one in sight. They all felt sure that the hounds would come back to them, as they had already done a dozen times.

"Yodote, my beauties!" Peters cried, gently, and, taking a horn from his pocket, blew it ever so softly. "Yodote," he cried again; and the hounds lifted their

heads. He then rode slowly down the glade for a little way, blowing softly on his hounds. Then looking back and holding up his hand to Hutchins, he went off as hard as he could go, with every hound in the pack at his heels.

At the same instant Hutchins set off in the opposite direction, holloaing like a madman.

"Tally-ho ! Tally-ho-o ! Tally-ho-o-o !" he shrieked.

"Hark holloa ! Hark holloa !" re-echoed from the other side of the hill. The galloping of horses mingled with the cries.

"Which way did he go ?" "Where did you see him ?" "Is it the hunted fox ?" "Where are the hounds ?" asked a dozen voices at once.

"He turned in here," cried Hutchins ; "Tally-ho—just by this gorse bush"—another screech—"he's dead beat, we shall have him in another minute," and he went on screeching as if he thought the hounds were five miles off.

They all holloaed—listened and holloaed again ; but the only one whose voice had any heart in it was Hutchins'. The rest could guess what had happened.

Joey spurred to the top of the hill ; Bullock flopping his legs against his horse's sides went full speed up the lane ; Crichton galloped down the lane blowing his horn ; the others dispersed in different directions, and Hutchins was left alone shrieking himself hoarse, and becoming more and more alarmed as the minutes went by and his nephew did not appear.

Mr. James Fulton, after his companions left him on the hanger, spent his time in rehearsing the part he imagined he was about to take in the next act according to his own fancy. The apparition of the fox, which came almost to his mare's feet, and the subsequent arrival of the hounds interrupted his study ; this, however, might have been

easily resumed had not the mare's equanimity been also upset to such a degree that he had to give his whole and



undivided attention to prevent her following the retreating pack. Remembering Peters' instructions to keep away



"THE MARE STARTED DOWN THE HILL."—Page 153.

from the hounds he would gladly have moved to a safer distance ; but nothing would induce her to go in any direction but the one she chose ; so he finally came to the conclusion that he had better dismount, which he with difficulty accomplished, and continued the meditation of his part on foot. Just as he was congratulating himself on being 'word-perfect' he heard the unmistakable signal for which he had been so long waiting. "That's it, James," said he to himself, "you know your cue. Gently old lady ; woa, gently !" and he went dancing round on one leg trying to get his foot into the stirrup. "We must come on together you know !"

He had hardly reached the saddle, and was endeavouring to get his off-foot into the stirrup, when the mare started down the hill of her own accord. Her object was the same as his, to get to the holloa as quickly as possible. So, keeping her hind feet together, she began to rock straight down the steep side of the hill, regardless of the windings of the path which would have led them by a gradual descent to the bottom. Her rider unaccustomed to the peculiar motion with which she achieved an almost perpendicular descent, with his face smarting from the saplings through which he was plunging, shut his eyes, let the reins slip through his fingers, and with his hands under his chin contrived well-nigh miraculously to maintain his equilibrium till he reached the level. The directions, however, to keep to the headland were forgotten—or if remembered were of no avail—for the mare, as soon as she found herself at the bottom of the hill, before he could get hold of the reins, set off at a gallop, and landed herself and her rider, the latter with his eyes still shut, in the middle of the bog. In describing a parabola through the air he managed somehow to pass one leg through the reins, so that as often as he tried to rise he was thrown on to his face by the mare struggling

to extricate herself; and it was not until she was thoroughly exhausted that he was able to regain his feet and reflect calmly upon the situation.

Fortunately for him, the meadow, owing to the long spell of dry weather, was not nearly so wet as usual at that time of the year, and he presently discovered that there was a place just to the left, firm enough to support the mare's weight, if he could only induce her to struggle in that direction.

"If it hadn't been for this blessed bog we should have gone bang over into the orchestra—and I don't know which would have been worse," he reflected, as the mare, preparing for another struggle, sat up dog-like in the swamp.

A final and despairing shriek from Hutchins seemed to urge her to the attempt.

"Come up, old woman," said the wigmaker, throwing his whole weight on the reins, and pulling her head towards the firmer ground, "we mustn't keep our audience waiting; they are getting impatient."

A heave, a grunt, a plunge, and "sock," "sock," "sock," as she drew her feet out of the black mud, and the mare was out of the bog. There was no difficulty about mounting now, as she stood with distended nostril and heaving flank; and her rider, once more in the saddle, to make up for lost time, stuck his spurs into her ribs, and made what haste he could to keep his appointment.

By the time they had surmounted the second hill, however, the mare had recovered from her exhaustion, and, catching sight of the horsemen as she reached the grassy glade—the few who were out had by this time come back to Hutchins—she pricked her ears and, with loud whinnies of delight, set off to join them at a canter.

"Where is your red-whiskered friend?" Bullock was asking Hutchins; "I have not seen him lately."

"Nor have I," answered Hutchins, hoping against hope for his nephew's appearance; "he was here when we found."

"Exactly! So were the hounds," said Bullock, with a significant look at Joey, whose sinking spirits rallied, as he thought Bullock had "hit it."

But at that very moment the missing gentleman appeared.

Anxious that his "debut," as he called it, should make a favourable impression, he decided to let his mare have exactly her own way, and, accommodating himself to circumstances, adopted an attitude—the prototype of one of the equestrian statues since erected in the metropolis—combining, according to the wigmaker's ideas, the dignity of a commander-in-chief with the graceful ease of an accomplished horseman; and in this manner came cantering on, doing his best to prevent the corners of his mouth betraying his satisfaction. As this part of the performance, however, had not been properly rehearsed, and he was unacquainted with the nature of the horse, he was taken quite unprepared, when, on joining her fellows, the mare stopped as dead as a stone. Without an attempt to keep his seat, which he left like a shot from a gun, he threw his arms round the mare's neck—fortunately erect—and swinging round under her neck reached the ground, mortified in mind but uninjured in body.

"Where the devil have you been?" said Crichton, as the unfortunate man stood bowing and scraping, like an actor called by the applause of the house before the curtain.

"In the bog, sir," said Fulton, pointing dramatically to the mud which covered himself and his mare.

"And what were you doing there?" said Bullock.

"Looking for uncle. I thought I should never see him again."

"Have you seen the hounds?" asked Joey.

"Yes; and I hope I shall never see *them* again."

"Where did you see them last?" they all asked at once.

"Blowed if I know! They were going up the hanger yonder before I got into the bog.

"By-the-by," said Bullock, "now I come to think of it, how did you know, Mr. Hutchins, that the hounds were coming to Bramston Cross-roads?"

Hutchins was prepared for this question, and, thinking that asking a question was preferable to telling a lie, replied, "Didn't you tell the keeper to stop the earth?"

"Confound that muddle-headed keeper," muttered Bullock; "I felt sure some one would let it out."

It seemed impossible that the hounds could have gone the way indicated by the wigmaker without being seen; still, his was the latest, and indeed the only, news, and no one had been that way, so they all rode off to the top of the hanger.

From there they could see for miles in every direction. They could discern the ploughman guiding his team across the distant field, the cattle ruminating, and sheep browsing, contentedly on the brown pastures. They could hear far off the lowing of oxen, the barking of dogs, the shrill whistle of some boy on his way to school, the postman's horn, and close by the buzzing of the bumble-bee, but neither sight nor sound was there to indicate the whereabouts of the hounds.

"What do you advise me to do?" said Joey to Crichton, breaking the long silence.

"Why do you ask me for advice? You had better ask Bullock. You got him down here to put us all right. Let him do it. He knows more about the hounds than he cares to say. What made him bring you *here*?—to the very place of all others where hounds

are likely to give you the slip. Ask him if he can tell you who has gone off with them. If you can't see through the whole plot after this, I can't help you. You must be blind. It is the most bare-faced imposture that ever was !”

This open denunciation of Bullock caused no little sensation among the bystanders, who were willing to believe almost anything, and were quite ready to accept any explanation of the mystery that was possible as the probable one. None of them knew anything about Bullock, except that he had failed to do what he had professed he could do ; and it seemed most unlikely that Crichton should speak so positively without strong grounds for his assertions. The only one who appeared quite unconcerned was Bullock himself.

“One moment, Mr. Crichton,” he said, “I am here as Mr. Spinks’ friend. At present I am no man’s servant, have no place to lose, and have as much right to speak as you have ; but I don’t intend to say anything just now. These gentlemen may think what they like. This is only another item in our little account, which I hope very shortly to be able to settle to everybody’s satisfaction.”

Crichton was on the point of making an angry reply when Joey interposed.

“I will have no quarrelling here. I am the master of these hounds, and I intend to be so. Bullock, I forbid you to speak. Crichton, you have made a most unwarrantable accusation against Bullock, which, later on, you must either prove or withdraw ; but let us hear no more of it for the present. What we have to do now is to find the hounds. We had better disperse in different directions. For my part, I don’t intend to go home till they are found. Bullock, as you don’t know the country, you had better come with me.”

As no one objected to this proposition, they settled how they should go, and separated, Joey and Bullock going in the direction of Bosby.

None of the others, with the exception of Crichton, were particularly anxious about the hounds, and were quite content to allow the hunt servants to have the trouble of finding them. Parkes, who knew pretty well what had happened, soon persuaded Murray to give up the search, and spend the afternoon among the partridges. Hutchins and the wigmaker, well satisfied with their morning's work, felt a longing for a glass of beer, and before long were back at the farm, while most of the others only waited till they were out of sight to turn towards their respective homes.

Crichton wandered on alone, cursing his luck, and wishing he had never heard of Joey or the hounds. Bullock's calmness puzzled him. It was unnatural, and meant mischief. He was disagreeably surprised to find Spinks had so much stuff in him. His influence was on the wane. Something must be done to re-establish it. But what! That was the question. Find the hounds? Solve the mystery? It seemed hopeless. He still felt convinced that somehow or the other Peters was at the bottom of it. Was Bullock in the know? On the whole he thought not. He suspected Hutchins and that red-whiskered ass knew something; but neither of them had gone off with the hounds. He wished Unwin would come back, but didn't see that he could do much good if he came. Marry the American? That wouldn't shut Bullock's mouth. Did Bullock know anything about him? He knew something about Dawkins, and there was little consolation in the reflection. Should he have a try for the heiress himself? Should he try Mrs. Spinks? His common sense told him he had better leave them both alone. Should he cut and run? He could

always do that, and the comforts of Bosby Hall were not to be relinquished without a struggle.

While Crichton was revolving these perplexing problems in his mind, Joey and Bullock were riding from wood to wood, from farm to farm, with their eyes on the ground, searching diligently for the tracks of the hounds.



As they came into a by-road leading to Bosby, Joey caught sight of a man ploughing at the far end of the field beyond, and shouted to him to know if he had seen the hounds. The man stopped his horses and looked towards Joey, but showed no further sign of intelligence ; nor was it till Joey had ridden close up to him and

repeated his question a dozen times that he said that he had been there since sunrise and had neither seen nor heard anything of them.

In the meantime, Bullock had discovered the tracks of two or three hounds in the same field, close under the hedge, and had followed them in the direction of the kennels until they passed through an open gate on to the road. Assuming that the main body of the pack had possibly been headed by the ploughman, and had run the other side of the hedge along the road, where it was impossible to track them, he cast back, and, entering the adjoining wood, had the satisfaction of finding in one of the sticky rides not only what he expected to find, the footprints of several hounds, but also the fresh tracks of a horse, and, on dismounting to make a closer examination, came to the curious conclusion that the horse had no shoes on his fore-feet.

"The sly old fox!" he said to himself. "I wonder where he got the horse. And to think it was I that told him where the hounds were going to meet! Oh! Bullock, Bullock! you mustn't let Mr. Joseph know of this!"

"What are you doing there, Bullock?" cried Joey. "Have you found anything?"

"Yes, Mr. Joseph," said Bullock, getting on to his horse with all haste, "the tracks of the hounds, as fresh as paint! They have gone down the road straight to Bosby. You can see here where they've gone out over the bank into the road."

Having skilfully distracted Joey's attention from the spot where he had discovered the horse's tracks, Bullock hurried out of the field, and they set off at a round trot towards Bosby, Joey occasionally exclaiming "For'ard on" as he detected faint impressions along the dusty road.

"Have you seen the hounds?" Joey shouted on seeing Sam, who had apparently come out to look for them.

"Kennels," shouted Sam, jerking his head over his shoulder.

"How long have they been there?"

"Two hours, most of them; the last is just come in."

"Did you see anybody with them?"

"Not a soul."

This was the truth, as Peters had thrown them into a covert close by the kennels, and had left them there, knowing that they would soon find their way home.

Returning to "The Hall," Joey despatched two of his grooms to let Crichton and the others know that the hounds were found, and retired to his room in profound despair.

He had not been there long when Bullock entered, holding a letter in his hand. His manner was very mysterious. "I have to go to London," he began, "on important business—most important, I may say—and I hope, Mr. Joseph, you will excuse me for a day or two. When I come back I hope to be able to put things a bit square. Now, Mr. Joseph, the next thing you have to do is to go and see Peters, and ask him to come out with you the next time you take the hounds out. Don't sit there shaking your head like that, Mr. Joseph. You trust old Bullock; the Captin's right for once, and I do know more than I care to say just at present; I will pull you through. But don't holloa till you're out of the wood, says I. This much I will promise you, Mr. Joseph, that if you do what I tell you you will be out of it this day week. Now, sir, why don't you make up your mind? I'll tell you what it is, you are downright afraid of that 'ere Captin. Now he says one thing, Bullock says another. I say 'go and see Peters,' he says, 'don't you have anything to do with him.' Which is it to be? If

Bullock ain't to have his turn, where's the good of sending for him. You take my advice, Mr. Joseph—go off now, this moment, before the Capting comes home. It's your only chance."

CHAPTER XXII.

JOEY yielded at last, but very reluctantly, to Bullock's persuasion.

His first attempt at reconciliation did not encourage him to make a second. He heard daily from Sam that Peters was better, but had waited in vain for any message to say that his advances were appreciated and that another visit would be acceptable.

It never entered his head that Mrs. Peters, in the glowing account she gave of her valour in ejecting Crichton, had taken no pains to discriminate between Crichton's behaviour and his own, and that consequently his visit was looked upon as an unwarrantable attempt to force his way into the house ; nor did he know that Peters regarded him as a spy, baffled and outwitted by an old woman and a kennel-feeder.

Thus, while Joey felt aggrieved that his overtures were not accepted, Peters was endeavouring to justify his own conduct by that of our hero.

The image of Mrs. Peters in the doorway constantly recurred to him, and he dreaded a second repulse at her hands. He was by no means clear, moreover, in his own mind, that Peters either would or could come to terms as long as Crichton retained his present position ; and to depose him was unjustifiable and out of the question.

The consideration that at last induced him to accede to Bullock's request—and it was the only thought that gave him any consolation — was that, whatever happened, things could not well be worse than they were.

As he went through the village the idea occurred to him to ask the Vicar to act as mediator between himself and Peters, and while he was debating the question Mr. Marshall opportunely came out of the Vicarage.

He was glad to see Joey, and expressed himself willing—as he ever was—to act as peacemaker.

“I have been wanting to talk to you on this matter,” he said, as they walked along together, “and cannot tell you how rejoiced I am that you are going to see the old man. He has got it into his head that he has been badly treated, and is so obstinate that nothing I can say to him has any permanent effect. I cannot help sympathising with him in a great measure, for there is no doubt he is making himself seriously ill. The noise of the hounds in the kennels, which he can hear constantly, and which he seems to think the sweetest music on earth, continually reminds him of his former life. It would have been far better for him to have gone right away from the neighbourhood. I saw him this morning, and he was looking so bad that I ordered him to bed, and sent for the doctor. But ‘who can minister to the mind diseased?’ It is not physic he needs, but some interest in life. A visit from you will do him more good than any prescription a doctor could give him.”

Although Mrs. Peters did not actually bar the doorway, her eyes said, plainly enough, “I wish you had come alone,” as Joey, under Mr. Marshall’s wing, entered the room where Peters lay in bed.

After a few brief enquiries as to the sick man’s health, the Vicar, pleading a pressing engagement, took his departure, and Peters and Joey were left alone together.

The position was embarrassing. The limpness of Peter’s grasp when Joey shook hands with him, and the brevity of his answers, could not be ascribed entirely to bodily weakness, and the more apparent it became that

Peters did not intend to help him out of his dilemma, the more Joey wished he had stayed at home ; and it was only the idea of meeting Mrs. Peters in the passage that prevented him making a bolt of it.

At length, despairing of coming to the point gradually, as he had hoped to do, he blurted out : "What do you think about the hounds ?"

"Think ?" cried Peters, savagely, "I spend all my time trying *not* to think about 'em !"

Another long pause increased the awkwardness of the situation, but, once started, Joey was determined to go on.

"Do you think you can tell me how or why they keep on disappearing ?"

"Look here, Mr. Spinks," Peters said, excitedly, raising himself on his elbow, "do you think it is fair to turn away a huntsman and then to come and ask his advice about the hounds ?"

Joey took hold of Peters' half-resisting hand.

"I'm very sorry," he said, "very sorry indeed, that I turned you out of your place. I made a mistake—what more can I say ? What can I do ? If Captain Crichton——" He stopped short. "It isn't his fault," he went on, "that he can't hunt the hounds, but——" He stopped again, not knowing how to express what he wished to say.

Pity began to work in Peter's heart, and his liking for the boy was getting the better of his ill-humour.

"It ain't so easy to hunt a pack of hounds," he said, withdrawing his hand, not unkindly, from Joey's. "The Captin' thought he could do it, but you see he can't. How could he, when he knows nothing about it ? Where's he learned it ? You can't learn it by walking about in a long coat with big buttons, nor yet by galloping over grass fields and big fences.

"A woodland country is the only one where you can

really learn all about fox-hunting, and *there* it takes years of patience and perseverance. It ain't the nature of a fox to be preserved in a little bit of a place, and when he's turned out of that to have nowhere to go to unless its five miles off ; he don't get a chance of showing his tricks and dodges, and you don't get a chance of learning them.

"I allow you may get a very good run that way, when you get hold of a good fox, but it's steeplechasing—it ain't hunting. It's all riding then, and keep 'em in sight if you can. Then you come to a bridge or a gate ; if you're first through, all right ; if not, you have to hunt the man in front of you, and won't see the hounds again till they stop and wait for you. You think you're going to jump everything, but there's plenty of places no horse that ever was foaled can jump, and my experience is that a good many that go in for it do most of the jumping over the dining-room table after they get home.

"Now, Mr. Spinks, you'll hear them laugh at this country, and say you never gets a run ; but you wait, and you'll see what our hounds can do, and what is more, you'll find that the very first to get left behind are the gentlemen what says their horses are too good for the country. Your horses, I'm told, are wonderful good ones, but unless I am very much mistaken it won't be long before you find they are not a bit too good to follow the old Bosby."

Mrs. Peters, whose curiosity was aroused at hearing the continuous hum of her husband's voice, here entered the room and stood just inside the door, listening.

"I remember," Peters continued, sitting up that he might have his hands free to emphasize the points of his story, "it was about the middle of March. It was almost as hot as summer in the morning, and the dust was flying ; but it got chilly in the afternoon and came

on to rain. We found an old dog fox about three o'clock. He jumped up in the heather there, where you was this morning.

"It was fifteen years ago, come spring, and I was riding a little chestnut horse—the best as ever I knowed—he never gave me a fall but once, and that was just after what I am going to tell you. He jumped on to a harrows and split his pastern. It was a sad business, that was. But the scent had improved wonderfully since the morning, and when the hounds were laid on they raced over those hills like the shadow of a cloud—all together—there wasn't no catching 'em.

"He was a travelling fox, and must have come up after a vixen. We found him lying just outside the earth, and he went straight back where he had come from. When I came out on to the road, I sees 'em running across a field half a mile in front of me. There was no road handy, but the land rode wonderful light that time of year, and, as I said, I was on the little chestnut. I could just keep within hearing of 'em."

"The rest of the field was following me. They didn't hear or see anything of 'em for miles. I came up with 'em on the canal down by Beechbrook. They were standing on the other side with their heads up, looking about for me. I saw what had happened; the fox hadn't taken the water, but he had got a start of us, and when we hit it off on the other side—he had crossed by the bridge lower down—it was 'noses down' and the difficulties began."

The old sportsman's enthusiasm was contagious, and Joey sat with ears, eyes, and mouth open, listening to the story of the run, described, to the minutest incident, as vividly as if it had happened the day before.

At length, carried away by the excitement of the moment when he caught sight of the varmint crawling

along the hedgerow, Peters, seizing Joey by the button-hole with one hand and waving the other in the air, cried :

“ And damn it, sir !—— ”



“ Peters ! Peters ! ” his wife whispered, hoarsely, from the other end of the room, endeavouring to recall him to his senses.

"Damn it, we killed him after all ! Jemima ! take down that picter of me on the little chestnut. I'm sure Mr. Spinks would like to see it."

In the act of taking the photograph of her husband on the little chestnut from the wall, Mrs. Peters struck the tender side of her foot against the leg of a chair. The pain, no doubt, was sharp, but, considering that she had only a moment before been reproving her husband, that was scarcely a sufficient excuse for the muttered "d——n" that reached the ear and tickled the fancy of their visitor.

A good listener is a godsend, and Joey was as welcome to Peters after his long and almost solitary confinement as a brief to the briefless barrister, or a sail to a castaway upon a coral reef. The old sportman's spirits rose as he spun yarn upon yarn ; his eye sparkled as it had not done for months, and his recent sufferings were forgotten in memories of the past.

"Can't you come out with us ?" said Joey, returning at length to the first object of his visit ; " I'm sure neither Captain Crichton nor myself can do any good unless you give us a hand."

At the sound of Crichton's name Peters' manner changed instantly.

"Can't be done, Mr. Spinks, as long as he is there. Do you think the hounds would go to him if I were anywhere about ? It ain't no use thinking of it."

Joey noticed the sudden change of manner, and realised that the dogged obstinacy of the old man was not to be overcome.

"Can you tell me, then, what to do ? for I must do something."

"I'll tell you what to do, and what I'll do. I will come out with you if I feels up to it, but I won't go near the hounds. I may be of some use, or I may not. What you have to do is to get out every horse you've got, and

every man you've got, and put all the men on all the horses ; and if you have any more put 'em on mules, donkeys, or anything as has four legs instead of two, and give 'em all strict orders on no account to lose sight of the hounds. If they all stick close to the hounds it ain't possible for anyone to take 'em away. If you had done it before it's as likely as not you wouldn't have lost 'em when you did. As I said, I won't go near the hounds myself ; but I will try and keep somewhere handy that I can be of use to you, Mr. Spinks ; but I won't have anything to do with that 'Captin','"

"Thanks, Peters, thanks," exclaimed Joey ; "I will do everything you say. When shall we go out ? Where shall we meet ?"

"For that matter," said Peters, "there's no particular hurry, and I don't feel like riding for a day or two. Say Thursday—that's in three day's time—and say Friar's Wood, t'other side of Thorncombe ; it's a nice open country, and will do as well as anywhere else."

"All right, Friar's Wood, Thursday. What time ?" said Joey, as he wished Peters good-bye.

"There's no use making it too early. Say nine o'clock ; that will give them all time to get to the meet. And you may as well write to every member of the Hunt, asking him as a particular favour to come out. Don't forget, and mind you send out every horse and every man that you can lay hands on."

Promising once more to carry out these instructions to the letter, Joey departed. When he got home he was relieved to find that Crichton was not in the house, and that he had left word that he had gone down to the Inn to see Lord Winterfield, and would not be back to dinner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON arriving at Ostend, whither he hastened after receiving the telegram on the lawn at Spetchley, Lord Unwin found his father was already placed in his coffin. At the foot of the coffin, which was in the Belgian manner, in the form of a Crusader's shield, there was laid an enormous wreath of coloured artificial flowers, to which was attached a card, with a deep black border, bearing the inscription—

“De Madame Baudin, avec regrets les plus tendres de la vie.”

The window of the scantily-furnished room was open, and the breeze from the sea had scattered a few sheets of paper on the uncarpeted floor. They were all tradesmen's bills, except one, which was an unfinished letter in his father's handwriting. It was addressed to the lady who had sent the wreath, and was a formal proposal of marriage.

As Lord Unwin put the letter in his pocket he felt thankful that it was written in English, and had probably defied the landlady's curiosity. Had Madame Baudin seen it she would no doubt have appropriated it, to be kept henceforth among her most sacred treasures. He is a hard man indeed who can stand unmoved by some feelings of affection or regret beside his father's coffin, and it was an emotion to which he had long been a stranger that prompted Lord Unwin to conceal the last act of his father's life. The satire was grim enough—the sham letter, the sham flowers—*la tendresse de la vie*!

He ran his eye over the bills ; the smallness of their sum pointed to a very limited credit.

"Poor old dad !" he reflected, "he has had a rough time of it lately, but what does that matter to him ? It is all over now. Taking it altogether, he enjoyed himself a good deal more than most of us. What a hardened old sinner he was ! It was want of money finished him, as it finishes a good many, and will finish me some day, perhaps much in the same way."

"Poor old dad !" he said aloud, as if addressing the coffin ; "you had one weak spot in your heart, and that was for your boy. You let me have the money as long as you had any, and when you hadn't—by Jove ! what an escape that old lady had !" His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of the doctor, for whom he had sent a messenger immediately on his arrival in Ostend.

The doctor was a short, strongly-built man, with a round, close-cropped head, and a moustache like a tooth-brush. He had a florid complexion and weak eyes, whose expression was partly concealed by blue spectacles. He was more matter of fact and less gushing than foreigners usually are, and, after the first salutations, waited for the Englishman to speak.

"I am obliged to you for your telegram," his lordship began, "and sent for you instead of calling myself at your house, as I wished to know as soon as possible to what cause you attribute my father's death."

"Certainly, my lord," replied the doctor, speaking French with a strong provincial accent, "I will let you see the certificate which I have given to the authorities," saying which he took a paper from his pocket-book and handed it to Lord Unwin. "You will see," he went on, "that I have ascribed the late Earl of Winterfield's death in that certificate to failure of the action of the heart, which is certainly in exact accordance with the truth."

"And this, my lord," he continued, taking another paper from his pocket-book, "is my little account."

Lord Unwin looked at it in surprise.

"Two thousand francs !" he exclaimed. "How long was my father ill ?"

"I have attended the late Earl of Winterfield for some little time."

"For what complaint ?"

"Well, my lord, I think latterly my patient did not take so much nourishment as he had been accustomed to, and suffered a good deal from weakness in consequence."

"You infernal scoundrel ! Do you tell me my father was starving, and then charge me two thousand francs for watching him die ?"

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but these little matters cannot be arranged without some expense."

So saying, he produced a small blue phial, which he withheld from Lord Unwin.

"My lord, I am sorry that I cannot let this little bottle out of my hand. You see what it is—you see the label, you see the colour of this bottle. I found it lying by the side of the late Earl of Winterfield." Lord Unwin saw the doctor's eyes looking steadily at him over the blue spectacles ; they were hard in spite of their weakness, and cunning, but he could not doubt the truth of what he said. He knew now why the letter was not finished.

"You insinuate," he said slowly, "that my father poisoned himself ?"

The doctor bowed assent.

"And if he did," said Lord Unwin sharply, "what is that to you ?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and replied, "Nothing, my lord, certainly nothing ; but I thought you might prefer to avoid the scandal of an inquest."

"And what if I prefer to have an inquest rather than pay your exorbitant demands ?"

"Certainly, you can have an inquest if you prefer it."

"Then how about this certificate," said Lord Unwin, striking the paper that he held, "that you have already given the authorities?"

The doctor smiled and said quietly, "I can say quite easily that this little bottle was not found till afterwards, and that——"

"But I can tell them," said Lord Unwin interrupting, "that it was found before!"

"But you were not present, my lord, when it was found."

"No, I was not; but I can tell them the whole story."

"So can I tell my story too, my lord, and I have the advantage of being a Belgian."

The game was too evidently in the doctor's hands. The truth must be hushed up at any price—but eighty pounds would make almost a clean sweep of what he had managed to scrape together in London. The only thing left was to make the best bargain he could. With this intention Lord Unwin began: "You are quite right, doctor. I am afraid I spoke somewhat excitedly just now, but you will make some allowance for me under the circumstances. I appreciate the delicacy of your thought in wishing to spare me any unnecessary pain in connection with this sad affair; but as for your charge of two thousand francs, I assure you that is more than I possess in the world. You are incredulous, I see. I suppose you think, like most foreigners, that every English nobleman is a Croesus. I have the misfortune to be an earl and a beggar. You do not suppose if I had any money I should have allowed my father to die like this!"

"I am exceedingly sorry, my Lord Winterfield, if I seem rapacious, but as I said, these little matters cannot be arranged without certain expenses; there is the burgo-master to be considered—he has signed the certificate,

and there is my own reputation, which is worth something in Belgium."

"Then let us say one thousand."

"That is quite impossible. I must again say two thousand—two thousand or——"

The doctor, instead of completing the sentence tapped the phial significantly.

Lord Unwin took out his cheque book.

"I regret, my lord, that I can only accept cash."

"But, supposing I have not got the cash?"

"Then my lord must procure it. Perhaps one of the banks, or the English Consul—he is a kind gentleman—or my Lord Winterfield, your father, had friends in Ostend. He was writing a letter ——"

"If you speak another word I'll break your head! Sit down!" Lord Unwin cried as the doctor rose from his seat, and he proceeded to count the bank notes—ten, twenty, thirty, eighty.

"There! take them and never let me see your face again. I have not five pounds in the world to bury my own father."

"But my Lord Winterfield can write a cheque or——" The doctor without waiting to finish what he was going to say, made his escape to the nearest *bureau de change*.

Twelve pounds some odd shillings was all Lord Unwin had left to pay the bills and get the coffin to England, and the bills alone amounted to over three hundred francs. The idea of burying his father in Ostend or anywhere but in the family vault, or of leaving his father's bills unpaid, he, to do him justice, did not contemplate at the moment. These duties were sacred, if anything were sacred, and must be performed.

He sat facing the wreath. "'Madame Baudin, Villa Bon Esperance.' That infernal doctor! What devil put it into his head? I'm hanged if I can do it!"

"But you could pay her back," suggested an inward counsellor.

He laughed. "'When will you pay me, say the bells of Old Bailey? I do not know, says the great bell of Bow.' By Jove, it's a long time since I played oranges and lemons. I was a happy little devil then. Poor Bessie, that was the first time I ever saw her. How little she thought—My God! what a brute I have been!"

For the first time in his life he felt remorse. It was an unpleasant experience—a sensation to be got rid of as soon as possible, and carefully avoided for the future. He began to walk up and down the room whistling, but the sight of the coffin stopped that. So he walked on without whistling, and every time he turned towards the wreath he saw "Madame Baudin, Villa Bon Esperance."

"Good hope, good hope," he repeated. "I can't stand this; I must get out into the fresh air!"

It was a fête day. Boys and girls were running races on the sands; thin horses and lazy donkeys were being beaten along the shore; rockets were bursting in the air, and fire balloons sailing down the wind. Near the fish market there was a crowd collecting round a raised platform, on which two fisher lads were seated opposite one another at a table. They were blindfold, and each held before him a bowl of porridge and a wooden spoon. They were trying which could be the first to get his porridge down the other's throat. They held their mouths wide open, and the crowd shrieked with delight as they bedaubed each other's faces with the mess.

At another time Lord Unwin might have enjoyed the fun, but now he turned away in disgust and wandered on. Suddenly it occurred to him that possibly his father had an account at some bank in Ostend. He wondered that he had not thought of it before, and hurrying back to his father's lodgings procured the address of the bank from the landlady.

The bank manager was extremely civil, but regretted that Lord Winterfield's account was 33.25 frs. overdrawn. Perhaps one of Lord Winterfield's tradesmen would oblige. He was sorry it was not in his power to cash a cheque.

Lord Unwin found his way back to the digue and wandered down the line of villas that faced the sea. It was absurd to be disappointed. What hope could there have been of finding money in the bank? "What hope? Good hope, good hope," he repeated to himself, and then drew his hand across his eyes to find out if *Bon Esperance* had got upon his brain or if it were really there in front of him. Yes, there were the gold letters glistening in the sun upon the door post.

He turned and walked away, rapidly at first, then slower and slower, till he stopped. Again he turned, and slowly retraced his steps to the gilt letters, and rang the bell.

Madame Baudin was at home, and he was shown into the salon. As he looked around, while waiting for her to appear, he summed up his impressions in one word, "Money."

"By golly! poor old dad—no wonder!" was the exclamation that he involuntarily made as Madame Baudin entered the room; but, advancing towards her with a smile that an angel might envy, he bowed respectfully over her outstretched hand.

The charm that won the toleration of Mrs. Spinks made short work of Madame Baudin, whose ears readily drank in the insidious flattery, which a thorough knowledge of the French language, and a good accent, made appear natural and sincere even from the lips of an Englishman. Within ten minutes of his first introduction, Lord Unwin felt he might safely venture on obtaining the object of his visit, but, like the angler who allows the pike to gorge his bait before striking—or, to use another



simile, like the surgeon who lets his patient come under the full influence of his anæsthetics before commencing a crucial operation—he thought it more judicious to make assurance doubly sure by allowing his victim time to absorb his flattery and feel the full force of his fascinating power.

“Ah! Madame,” he said at last, taking one of the widow’s hands tenderly in his, “knowing as I do the regard you have for my dear father’s memory, and knowing, too, the delicate sentiment that you inspired in his breast, so touchingly expressed in your own words, ‘*les plus tendres de la vie*’—a sentiment as imperishable as the wreath itself——”

He paused, and a tear like the first drop of a thunder shower fell heavily upon his shirt-cuff.

“It is this knowledge, dear Madame Baudin,” he went

on, "that emboldens me to ask a favour—a favour that I could not ask of anyone but yourself."

He paused again while she assured him there was nothing he could ask that she would not grant. He then went on to explain that there is often a difficulty in getting money in a place where one is not known, that there were several small sums—small at least for one in his father's position in life—owing to various tradesmen ; that the doctor's fees were considerably larger than he anticipated, and that the expenses of the transport of the coffin were very heavy. His inexperience, the suddenness of the shock, and the haste with which he left home were some excuse, he hoped, for his being so unprepared. He would rather have waited for the money to be forwarded from England, were it not imperative that he should return as soon as possible to look after the family estates. Could Madame Baudin, he concluded, possibly make it convenient to cash him a small cheque ?

The lady expressed her regret at having no money in the house, but was willing to write a cheque for any amount he liked to ask ; and she produced her cheque-book. Lord Unwin did the same.

"How much do you wish ?" said the lady.

He made a rapid mental calculation as to how much he could venture to ask.

"Possibly," he said, "some of the better-to-do tradesmen would wait, as they would know that my father had money to his credit at the bank, on which I could not draw immediately. In that case—it is unfortunate that his death was so sudden—perhaps 5,000 francs would cover all that is absolutely required——"

The widow's countenance plainly showed him he had not overshot the mark, and he went on : "but of course I would rather leave nothing unpaid, and if your means allow you to make it 10,000 frs., I shall be eternally grateful."

Without any hesitation Madame Baudin went to her *escritoire* and wrote a cheque for 10,000 frs., and then Lord Unwin took the pen from her and drew one on his London banker for £400.

"A thousand times a thousand thanks, dearest lady," he exclaimed, as they exchanged cheques, "your generosity will be its own reward. Ah ! If only my dear father could have lived !"

Refusing her pressing invitation to stay and dine, he left with further protestations of eternal gratitude, and betook himself to the most fashionable hotel, where he endeavoured to drown his conscience—and for once it died hard—in the best champagne that money could procure in the town.

The next morning, as soon as the banks were open, he cashed the cheque, and having collected the necessary official papers and made arrangements for his passage by the evening boat, took the train to Bruges, where he might spend the day without fear of running up against Madame Baudin, or receiving a visit from any of his father's creditors.

Upon his arrival in England any notions that he may have had of placing money to his credit to meet the cheque for £400 were dispelled by the family solicitor, who openly avowed his satisfaction on finding that his lordship had sufficient to pay for the funeral, for there was no use attempting to disguise the fact that not one single penny could be raised, even for that purpose, upon the remaining securities.

The funeral took place in the village church where the Earls of Winterfield had been laid for generations, and within a quarter of a mile of the farmhouse where Mary Spinks spent her childhood. To the new generation that had grown up the wicked earl was nothing but a name, and the procession, consisting of the new earl and the solicitor, roused little interest in the village.

Knowing the advantage of having a considerable amount of ready money, Lord Unwin, henceforth to be called Lord Winterfield, lost no time in getting back to London, where by artifices best known to himself, he succeeded in doubling his capital in a very few days, and was in a fair way to multiply it still further when he received Crichton's letter, hinting at the possibility of an alliance between Joey Spinks and Miss Bond. He left town the next morning for the inn at Bosby, where Crichton, who had spent the best part of the day looking for the hounds, found him the same afternoon.

Mutual admiration between scoundrels must be based on their respective qualities as such ; accordingly, though neither Crichton nor Lord Winterfield would trust the other a yard further than he could see him, they duly appreciated one another's strong points, and were delighted to meet again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PERSUADED by his friend that no time must be lost if he wished to prevent the public announcement of the engagement of Miss Bond to his supposed rival, Lord Winterfield walked over to Spetchley early the next morning.

A small steeplechase course had been laid out in the park, and there he found Joey and the two young ladies on horseback. Jessie Bond and Mary Brain were become inseparable friends. The latter, who had ridden from the time she wore short frocks, was an accomplished horsewoman, and was giving the former a lead over the fences, while Joey, as riding-master, rode alongside giving his instructions.

"Let him have his head, Miss Jessie—chuck up your chin when he rises—well done ! you have the knack of it now, and if you can sit over a hurdle you can sit over a house."

The word "Jessie" was the only part of Joey's speech that reached Lord Winterfield's ears, and he muttered to himself, "Humph ! It has got as far as Christian names at any rate."

Only to the graceful horsewoman is the riding habit becoming, and Miss Bond looked perfectly bewitching as she patted the neck of her horse, who, excited by the jumping, was tossing his pretty head and throwing the flecks of foam from his lips. The lovely colour which the exercise had brought into her cheeks, the sparkle of her laughter-loving eyes, and the elegance of her whole figure,

were more than enough to account for the pang of jealousy that shot through his lordship's breast. Rich or poor, high-born or low, she was cut out for a duchess, and she was actually thinking of throwing herself into the arms of a hairdresser. To be cut out by a little brute like Spinks ! But it hadn't quite come to that yet.



Such were Lord Winterfield's reflections as he watched them careering round the park. Still it is difficult for a man on foot to make love to a lady on horseback, and as the time passed slowly by he felt he was not making much progress with his suit.

"I'm so sorry, Lord Winterfield," said Miss Bond, as she drew rein where he was standing, "that you are not riding. Won't you go and get one of my father's horses ?

He would be delighted, I am sure, for they want exercise. Or would you prefer," she continued, as he declined her offer, "to join my father? He is shooting on the farm close by; I heard his gun just now. Will you go and find him and bring him back to lunch?"

He gladly availed himself of the suggestion, and, guided by the frequent report of the gun, which seemed to show that partridges were plentiful, he had no difficulty in finding Mr. Bond. The old gentleman had been shooting straighter than usual, and was in high spirits. He welcomed the young man warmly, pressed him to take his gun, and, when he refused to do that, despatched the under-keeper at full speed to fetch another from the house. By the time the keeper returned with the gun and a bagful of cartridges, they had driven a lot of birds into the turnips. The dogs worked steadily, and the birds sat like stones.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" exclaimed the Yankee, as his companion, with unerring precision, killed every bird that rose before him. "Superb! no tailoring, no legs down, no runners! That comes of being brought up to it. Come up and shoot whenever you like; if I am not here, there's the keeper and the dogs. You are always welcome to them; and there are any number of partridges. If I had had the luck to have a son I should have liked to see him shoot like that!"

Thinking that here was an opportunity that he ought not to miss, Lord Winterfield said:

"All you can do, Mr. Bond, is to take care that your son-in-law is a good shot."

"Ah! Jessie—yes, I suppose she will marry some day. Isn't she a lovely child, Lord Winterfield? She has taken to riding lately. You must see her on horseback. It is superb!"

Lord Winterfield readily acquiesced, and having expressed his admiration of the young lady, said:

"Your daughter asked me to bring you back to luncheon ; would you mind returning with me now, as there is something I am particularly anxious to speak to you about ? "

They had come to the end of their beat, and Mr. Bond was quite ready to oblige him. Telling the keeper that he would want him again in the afternoon, he took the young man's arm, and, as they turned towards the house, said :

"Now, Lord Winterfield, I am at your service."

"It is a very delicate matter," Lord Winterfield began, "and one on which I have wished to speak to you for a long time, but have hesitated for many reasons. I only speak now because I fear I may hesitate too long."

As he paused, Mr. Bond laughed.

"I can't help you till I know what you are hesitating about."

Lord Winterfield was surprised to find he was getting nervous.

"I want to speak to you about your daughter."

A look of sadness came over Mr. Bond's face.

"For a long time," the young man went on, "in fact, since the first day I saw her, I have wished to—to make her my wife. I knew that some day she would be rich, and I was a poor man."

He paused again, but a nod from his companion told him to go on.

"This is what has prevented my speaking before. My father's death has made very little difference in my income, but I have succeeded to his title ; I have inherited one of the oldest and most honoured names in our country, and that, perhaps, is an offering not unworthy of your only child."

He felt, somehow, that he had struck a wrong note, and the old man's silence increased his nervousness, but he had to continue.

"You may not think that that is a good reason for my speaking to you now, but there is another reason. It is possible, I am afraid, that your daughter may become entangled—I didn't mean that, Mr. Bond, I assure you—engaged, I should have said, to some one beneath her in social position, to a man who could not give her the opportunity of displaying her many charms in the society in which she deserves to move, to which she would be so bright an ornament ! It would be more than a pity if she made such a *mésalliance*——"

"Stop !" said Mr. Bond, sternly, and at the same time he dropped his companion's arm and stood facing him. "You have said enough. What is it you want ?"

"I wish to have your leave, sir, to court your daughter. I think if she knew that it was your wish——"

"Lord Winterfield !" Mr. Bond broke in abruptly. "I am not an Englishman, and perhaps do not understand your customs ; and as I am not a lord I may not be able to grasp the importance which you attach to a title. I am a man who has no sort of reverence for customs or titles, as such. I value them only when they are held by good men. I know nothing against you personally, and have, therefore, not the slightest objection to your courting my daughter. Your being poor does not make any difference to me. What is mine is my daughter's—she is a rich woman. But do not think I shall say one word to influence her choice. Your allusion to what you are pleased to term a *mésalliance* is lost upon me. Any man who is as good and pure as she is is a match for her, and none other. To him my hand and my heart are open. The man Jessie loves—be he prince or peasant—she shall marry. He shall have her for the asking. When she does make her choice—for women have an instinct in these matters that we have not got—it will be a good one, or she is not what I believe her to be.

Bring Jessie to me" (there was a slight break in his voice), "and you shall have her with my blessing. But let us get back to the house, you must be hungry."



"Bring her to him," there was the rub. She made herself extremely agreeable to Lord Winterfield as to everyone else. Her manner was perfectly frank and natural. She did not openly avoid him, or show any preference for Joey's company ; but as soon as ever he contrived to be alone with her for a moment, Miss Brain was sure to make her appearance. So Lord Winterfield spent several wet days fruitlessly at Spetchley. However, if he did not advance his suit, neither did "that little brute Spinks," and he had come to the conclusion that Crichton was wrong.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE meet at Friar's Wood had been fixed at nine o'clock, in the hope that every member of the Hunt to whom Joey had appealed would be induced to attend at that hour. At seven o'clock that morning, Peters sat at the table in his parlour ; his breakfast was before him, but it remained untouched. His breeches and gaiters were covered with mud, and as he sat with his elbows on the table, leaning his head upon his hands, he looked desperately tired and ill. In vain his wife coaxed him to eat. "You can't go on like this," she said, "it ain't worth it. You'll kill yourself—you're not fit to ride—give it up, and send word to Mr. Spinks that you are too ill to go out."

"You don't understand, Jemima. A woman never does understand. It's no use arguing with 'em. What's the good of giving it up before I've tried?"

"But you have tried, and it has done no good."

"Yes, it has done good, and I'm going to try again. If it don't come off this time, I'll give it up."

"Then try and eat a little something do, there's a good boy."

She took a morsel of bacon on his fork and put it to his mouth, but he turned away from it.

"Can't do it, Jemima. But the horse will be here in a few minutes ; let us have my boots and breeches, and the old red coat—the oldest of them, it's a lucky one. No, I shan't want my horn—not this time—next time, maybe."

The idea of carrying the horn again cheered him up.

He rose, pulled himself together, and began to get into his hunting kit.

"I'm tired," he said, as his faithful consort buckled on his spurs, "that's all as is the matter with me. If I had time to get forty winks I should be all right."

A knock at the garden gate announced the arrival of Mr. Spinks' groom. He was leading a mare—a chestnut, two white stockings on her hind legs, five years old, a trifle under 15.3, with an amount of bone rarely seen in a thoroughbred. Her quarters were muscular, body not too long in a mare, girth deep, chest strong and prominent, fore-arm—Peters vowed he had never seen anything like it—shoulder perfection, withers high, neck strong and elegant, ears small, eye full and generous, muzzle fine, and the head withal well poised and blood-like.

Peters walked round her again and again.

"That's the best bit of stuff ever I saw! Are they all like that?"

"Most of them are pretty good," replied the groom, "but this is the best of the lot according to my fancy."

"So I should think," said Peters, "or anybody else's fancy. Put that leather up half a dozen holes. Well, I never," he exclaimed, as he settled himself in the saddle; "it's like having the roof of a church between your legs. Gently my beauty! What action! It's just as if she was made of indiarubber! The Captin' gave a long price for her, did he? Then it's about the only good thing he has ever done."

"Looks like business, the pair of 'em," said the groom to Mrs. Peters, as they watched her husband ride away. "Good morning, mum, I must hurry back; every man jack of us is turning out to-day."

Peters trotted quietly along towards Friar's Wood.

"What have we got here," he said, opening a sandwich case at the back of his saddle. "Beef—that's very kind

of Mr. Spinks. And what's this ? Whisky ? No, brandy. That's very thoughtful of him. I could teach that boy."

A nip of the brandy did him a world of good, and by nine o'clock, as he approached Friar's Wood, he felt a different man.

The rain of the last two or three days was succeeded by a fog, which grew thicker as the sun rose higher. There was no wind, and the rays of the sun, now getting weaker every day, were unable to dispel the vapours they had raised.

The Hunt turned out in force—men and women, girls and boys—the last kept away from school by an epidemic of measles—on all sorts and conditions of horses. There was much excitement and more talking. Everyone had something to say about the great effort that was about to be made, on which the very existence of the Bosby hounds seemed to depend.

"Where is Parkes ?" asked someone. "We can't get on without 'old Tom.'"

"He's somewhere about ;" said Murray, "I rode to the meet with him."

"That's all right," exclaimed a dozen voices together.

"Good morning, ladies ; good morning, gentlemen," said Joey, as he rode up ; and half a hundred voices said "good morning."

"Hounds are looking well, Captain Crichton, *considering*," said Colonel Rideabout, with a stress on the last word.

"The Colonel" invariably said and did the wrong thing at the wrong time.

"Well enough to leave you behind," replied Crichton.

"Good morning, my lord," the Colonel went on, unabashed, as Lord Winterfield came up. "Your horse looks a bit fat. You have not been out much lately, I suppose."

His lordship, taking no notice of "the Colonel," drew up beside Crichton.

"Have you seen Peters?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I have not seen him, but he is here. Find him out if you can, and keep your eye on him."

Peters had kept on the lower side of the wood, where he was found by the inevitable Parkes.

"G-good morning, P-Peters; wh-ich way d-do you think the h-hounds will run this morning?"

"Which way is the wind, Mr. Parkes?"

"Old Tom" wet his forefinger and held it in the air.

"If there is any, it is n-orth-west."

"Then, sir," Peters whispered, "I expect them to run very nearly dead against it. If you stand down by that oak tree at the far corner, you're as likely as anywhere to get a view; and if you hear the hounds coming your way you won't do any harm if you give them a holloa! There is something the matter with my throat this morning, or I'd do it myself."

"I c-can do that much for you," said Parkes, "b-b-ut how a-b-bout the f-ox the k-k-eeper p-p-added in here this morning?"

The old man smiled: "Well, Mr. Parkes, I don't mind telling you that was the top of my middle finger and the point of my knife."

"Old Tom" laughed and rode off to take his stand by the oak tree, while Peters made his way to the road, and took up a position some distance from the hounds, but within sight of several horsemen, amongst whom he recognised Lord Winterfield.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Peters? I see you've got your fore-shoes on this morning."

Peters looked round to see the speaker.

"Mr. Bullock! I needn't ask how you are; I see you have your head screwed on the right way to-day. I've

been expecting you to come down and see me, to tell me where the hounds was going to meet."

Bullock laughed, winked, and patted his left side in a mysterious manner. "I've been to town. It's all done. I've got it here," he said, and patted his side again. "You needn't give yourself any further trouble."

"Confound the old fool!" said Peters, to himself, as Bullock went on towards the hounds. "What does he mean? I hope he ain't going to spoil my little game."

Meanwhile Joey was making preparations for throwing the hounds into the covert.

"I want some of you," he said, addressing those who were nearest to him, "to ride to different points to make sure that the hounds don't break covert without being seen. The keeper says we shall find at once. He padded a fox fresh in there this morning. Don't get too close together; let him have a chance of getting away."

The first whip had ridden down to the corner where Parkes was standing.

"I'll stay here," said the latter, "you g-get al-ong a b-bit —j-just a little f-urther than you c-can see."

The whip was followed a few minutes later by Colonel Rideabout.

"G-get b-back a bit, and k-keep your eye down that ride," said Parkes; and the Colonel, pleased to be noticed for once in a way, hastened to obey orders, and, with his back to Parkes, gazed steadily into the wood.

He was no sooner posted than Murray arrived.

"G-get along d-down the b-bottom, Murray; there's no one in sight." And Murray followed the first whip.

He had hardly disappeared in the fog when there was a whimper. Parkes listened. Two or three hounds opened. They were coming towards him. He hesitated a moment to make sure, and then holloaed.

It was the true ringing note of the seasoned sportsman.

"That's Parkes' holloa," said Lord Winterfield, who was with Crichton ; "get to him as quick as you can."

With his horn to his lips, Crichton cleared the fence and landed in the field where Parkes was cheering the leading hounds on to the line.

Tally-ho ! Hark-holloa ! Gone away ! resounded on all sides, as the horsemen came pouring down in every direction. In their anxiety to follow their instructions and keep the hounds in sight, many of them overshot the body of the pack, and Joey had all he could do to keep them back, but the hounds, stooping to the scent, in a few seconds were vanishing in the mist, and the horsemen, thinking they had waited long enough, broke from control, and started in pursuit.

The fences were blind, and there were few gaps. It was no use looking for gates in the fog. Those who didn't mean to go straight might as well have stayed at home.



The first fence stopped more than a third of the field, Bullock among them. A few who were fortunate in

finding a gate were so long in opening it that they never heard the hounds again. After the first ten minutes there were half a dozen empty saddles which their late occupants were hopelessly pursuing in the surrounding darkness.

"Have you seen my horse?" shouted the Colonel, as the gardener's boy sped past on the pony that pulled the lawn-mower, a mile in the rear of the hounds; but the boy was much too intent on the pursuit to answer.

The grooms were riding—one and all—in an half-a-crown-an-hour-at-the-seaside sort of way. It was a treat they were not likely to get again, and they meant to make the most of it. "There goes Mr. Dawkins," cried one of the stable lads, as his chief took a header over his horse's ears at a stiff post and rail. "Come up 'os," and the feather-weight landed six yards into the next field. Loose reins—whips and spurs—tear and blazes—blood and thunder—on they went! But the hounds were getting further away in spite of it all. They were running as fast as ever and almost mute.

The horses were not in condition for this sort of thing, and bad riding soon told its tale. Some refused, some fell, some stopped completely exhausted. Twenty minutes from the start the hounds were still racing, and there seemed no chance of a check nor a notion of a turn. Any rider who had turned from the bee-line had been left behind.

Half-an-hour gone, but half a dozen were within hearing of the hounds. Joey's second horseman, who had been riding with the best of them, broke a stirrup-leather and fell heavily. Murray got stuck up on a bank, his raking bay getting his hind leg into a stiff binder that lay along the top. By the time he got clear the hounds were gone, and the horse's tail going 200 to the minute forbade him to go on. Lord Winterfield pulled his horse

into a walk. Both the whips had got to the bottom of their horses, and were compelled to dismount. The whole way was strewn with wrecks, like the coast of Cornwall after the destruction of the Spanish Armada.

Crichton still led the way, followed by Joey half a field behind. The former, magnificently mounted, rode with consummate judgment. Joey, good rider as he was, could not hold a candle to him. It was only his advantage in weight that enabled him to keep him in sight.

"This way, Spinks," cried Crichton, looking back over his shoulder, as they approached an impracticable beech-hedge. One or two of the tail hounds were scrambling through between the roots. Close to them, on the right, was a gap filled by a rough paling about four feet high. Crichton steadied his horse at it, and Joey turned in the same direction. Crichton rose well over the paling and disappeared. A sheet of water rose in the air, and Joey pulled up just in time to see the horse's ears with a boot on either side of them above the green surface of a pond.

"Don't stop for me," Crichton spluttered, as his head reappeared covered with slimy weed; "get on to the hounds, or you will lose them!"

Fifty yards to the right, Joey had the luck to hit off a line of gates, lying in the direction in which the hounds had gone. Pushing his horse along as well as he could, he soon overtook a hound plodding painfully after his companions, and then, to his great relief, heard them again, not far in front of him. "There they go," he cried, "and I'm alone with them. If I can only kill this fox! Peters was right. Why didn't we do this before? I suppose this is what has happened every time, and no one has been there to see it!"

As the pace had slackened considerably, he pulled his horse into a trot, and, taking out his horn, blew it spasmodically as he went along, in the hope of letting Crichton hear where he was.

Suddenly the hounds wavered and spread. They were in the middle of a grass field. "That's funny," said Joey, who stood still waiting till they had made their cast, "he must be for'ard. For'ard ! For'ard !" he cried, and galloped across the field trying to blow his horn. Not a hound looked at him ; some lay down, some stood staring about ; they were scattered all over the field. Joey holloaed and screamed, but without the slightest effect. "If only Crichton were here !" he exclaimed ; "where can he be ?" And like the heathen of old, who vowed hecatombs to Diana, he swore he would give a hundred pounds to see Peters.

If the goddess ever answered the prayer of her votary, he could not have been more agreeably astonished than Joey was when the sound of a galloping horse came on his ear, and a red coat on a chestnut horse emerged from the mist. "Peters !" he cried, "they brought it as far as this, the fox has gone on, but I can't get the hounds to come to me."

"Give me your horn, Mr. Spinks, they'll come to me."

"Too-to-to-to-too—too-to-to-to-too"—the hounds flew to the sound.

"Get on to him, get on to him," cried Joey, popping his whip as he galloped after them. "By George ! I thought he couldn't ride," he exclaimed, a minute afterwards, as Peters popped over a stiff fence without appearing to notice it, and, only half liking it, he just managed to get his tired horse over the same place.

Peters held the hounds on for a quarter of a mile.

"Where the deuce is he going to ?" said Joey, hardly able to keep up with him, "the man must be mad !" But as he said the words away went the hounds upon the scent. "Peters," he shouted, "I'll give you that mare !"

Presently the hounds flashed over a road into a large wood, and threw up once more. They could not own the scent in the covert.



"He has run the road," said Joey.

"Not he, sir ; you stay here in case he slips back ; I'll get for'ard with the hounds, and don't come on till you hear the horn."

Peters disappeared, and Joey waited. Five minutes

went by, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, and Joey was perplexed, but still stuck to his post. Again came the sound of a horse galloping along the road.

"H-ulloa ! Spinks, wh-ere are they ?" Parkes called out, as he came in sight.

Joey explained what had happened.

"There's s-omething wrong," said Parkes, opening the gate into the wood ; "it's no use st-staying here, we must get on."

As they rode down the wood they met the chestnut mare coming back without her rider.

"Parkes !" cried Joey, in an agony, "Peters is killed ; I know he's killed" ; and he set spurs to his horse, leaving Parkes to catch the mare.



In a meadow just outside the wood, he came upon the hounds, and in the midst of them, close to the ditch, lay the old huntsman. Flinging himself from the saddle, Joey fell on his knees beside him. Peters' cap had fallen off, his eyes were closed, and his face was as pale as death.

Joey tried but failed to find his pulse ; he then tried to hear if his heart was beating, but his own was beating so violently he could hear nothing. Parkes came up leading the chestnut mare. "He's dead," cried Joey ; "I know he's dead, and it is all my fault."

On the ground, close beside Peters, lay a fox's mask and brush. Parkes got off his horse, and put them in his pocket ; then, kneeling beside Peters, he raised his head on his knee. "B-brandly, Spinks, quick !" he said, and Joey gave him the flask from Peters' saddle. He moistened the bloodless lips, and, saturating his handkerchief, laid it on his forehead. Presently Peters opened his eyes, looked vaguely about him, and began to feel for something by his side. "All r-right, P-Peters, they are in my p-pocket." The old man smiled and closed his eyes.

"L-look sharp, Spinks, get on to the chestnut, she is as fresh as p-paint, and gallop b-back to the road. Half a mile to the left you'll find B-brain's h-ouse—a white house with g-green sh-utters, you c-can't miss it, tell them to send a c-cart at once. We must get him b-between hot b-blankets as soon as we can."

For some minutes Parkes kept on bathing his old friend's forehead, and chafing his hands, with more than a woman's tenderness. Peters opened his eyes and looked at him.

"It's all r-right, Peters, but you must lie still. D-don't worry yourself. It will all c-come right now."

Crichton got his horse out of the pond uninjured, and, guided by Joey's track and the sound of his horn, followed him at a foot's pace. At the gate entering the wood he was surprised to find the tracks of three horses, and, following them along the ride, he eventually came up to Parkes at the very moment that the latter was telling Peters it would all come right.

"How the devil did you two get here ?"

"B-by land, old ch-ap. You seem to have c-come by w-ater."

"It's all a confounded fraud, and you are at the bottom of it. It was you who holloaed. If you saw a fox, or if the hounds have been within a mile of one this morning, I'll eat my hat !"

"Y-ou can eat your b-b-boots, too, for all I care."

"That infernal old rascal !" Crichton began, shaking his fist at Peters.

"L-ook here, Crichton, you had b-better sh-ut up."

"Why should I sh-ut up ?"

"B-because I'll p-p-punch your head if you don't. As soon as I get Peters into bed I'll g-give you the s-oundest thrashing you ever had in your life."

At this juncture Joey returned and said that Mr. Brain was coming along with a mattress in a spring cart.

"I'm sorry, Crichton," he exclaimed, "you lost the end of the run. We killed our fox. Parkes has the brush in his pocket."

This bit of news staggered Crichton. If Spinks had seen the fox killed, he reflected, there must have been a fox after all ; still, it might have been turned down before the hounds at the finish or——

"Let me have a look at it," he said to Parkes.

"Here, Spinks," said Parkes, quite quietly, "c-come and take my place while I show Crichton what he is evidently d-determined to see."

Parkes went straight up to Crichton, who was on horseback, and, making a feint as if he were going to strike him, put one hand under his foot and tipped him out of the saddle. Things were looking ominous for the latter, who was in no hurry to rise, seeming to think he was safer lying down than on foot, when the arrival of Mr. Brain put an end to the scene.

Without loss of time Peters was lifted into the cart and

driven off, followed by Joey and Parkes, who, taking no further notice of Crichton, left that gentleman to find his way home by himself.

On reaching Mr. Brain's house, whither Mr. Brain insisted on Peters being removed, they found the doctor had already arrived, and that everything was prepared for the reception of the invalid, who was carried straight upstairs and put to bed.

It seemed an age to Joey, who had been turned out of the room, before the doctor came down. Every few minutes he crept up to listen anxiously at the door, and time after time asked Mr. Brain if he thought Peters would get over it. At last the doctor came. Peters, he said, was perfectly conscious; he was not hurt, there were no bones broken, and there was no sign of his having had a fall. He must have fainted after getting off his horse. All he required was rest, and to be kept perfectly quiet. He was overdone mentally and bodily, and, having eaten hardly anything for some days past, had fainted from sheer weakness.

"I have something to say to him," said Joey; "may I go and see him?"

"Certainly not."

"Can I see him to-morrow?"

"No."

"The day after?"

"Perhaps."

"Will you give him a message from me?"

"Yes, if I think it advisable."

"Then will you tell him I want to know if he will come back as huntsman as soon as he is well again?"

The doctor promised to give the message the next morning, on condition that Joey returned to Bosby immediately and sent Mrs. Peters over to nurse her husband.

The miles flew past, and Joey chattered away as he chattered on the road to Epsom in the spring. He poured forth his heart to Parkes, and his confidence was in safe keeping.

"Wonderful run ! wasn't it ?" he exclaimed, for the fiftieth time. "How did you know which way we were gone ?"

"Well, you see, I kn-ew the run of the fox p-retty well."

"You don't mean to say you recognised the fox !"

"N-ot exactly ; althought I th-ought I recognised the brush when I saw it lying b-by P-Peters' side. I'll t-tell you what, I'll have the m-ask and the b-brush mounted for you with a s-silver p-plate and the d-date on it, for as long as you live you'll n-ever see a r-un like it."

"I believe you, my dear Parkes ; it is the luckiest day of my life, for I have asked old Peters to come back, and he's the best huntsman that ever was seen !"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ABOUT ten o'clock the next morning the butler at Bosby Hall went into Bullock's room.

"There's a jolly row going on in the study," he said. "The Capting and the master are going at it like one o'clock."

Bullock rose, put his hand into his breast pocket, and, finding that what he wanted was all safe, nodded mysteriously to the butler, and went out.

The door of the study was shut, but the angry voices of the two men quarrelling could be heard distinctly outside.

"Then all I can say is you're a —— fool."

"Fool or not, I have asked him to come back, and I shall stick to my word."

Bullock knocked, and entered the study.

"What do you want, Bullock?" said Joey; "I can't speak to you just now."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Joseph, but I have something to say that won't keep."

"What is it?"

"If you wait one minute, Mr. Joseph, you shall hear."

Impressed by the seriousness of Bullock's manner, and recollecting his mysterious behaviour of late, Joey told him to begin, and, seating himself, offered him a chair.

"I would rather stand, thank you, Mr. Joseph," he said, and turning to Crichton went on: "May I be allowed, Captain Crichton, to ask you a few questions?"

Crichton by this time had recovered his usual composure. Taking a newspaper from the table, and throwing himself into an armchair, he said, languidly : " Really, it is a matter of perfect indifference to me how many questions you ask, provided I am not expected to answer them."

"What is your name?" Bullock began, with the air of a Queen's Counsel rising to cross-examine an important witness.

Crichton, taking no notice whatever of the question, bit the end off one of Joey's best cigars, lit it, and turned his attention to his newspaper.

As Bullock saw no answer was forthcoming to his first question, he went on :

"What were your parents?"

Crichton took no notice, and crossed his legs.

"Where were you born?"

No answer.

"What school did you go to?"

Crichton turned over the page.

"When did you enter the service?"

As no answers were to be extracted, the questions followed in quick succession.

"What regiment were you in? Why did you leave it? What was your occupation from the time you left the regiment until you met Mr. Spinks? When did you first make the acquaintance of Mr. Dawkins?"

There was an evil look in Crichton's face as he put down the paper and exclaimed :—

"By G—d, Spinks, if you don't kick him out of the room, I shall."

"Wait a minute," said Joey, who, guessing that these questions were not being fired off at random, felt no inclination to stop Bullock; "let us hear what he has to say, and kick him out afterwards if necessary."

Bullock bowed solemnly to Joey, and taking a bundle of papers from his breast pocket, began :

"You will excuse me, Captain Crichton, if I take this opportunity of answering the accusation which you made against me a few days ago. I did not lose my temper on that occasion, and therefore, may expect you to listen to me now without losing yours."

He then with the greatest gravity opened the first paper of his bundle and began to read :

"James Snelling was born at Catsholme in the West Riding of Yorkshire, March 19th, 1832."

He drew the next paper from his bundle, saying :—

"This is the certificate of his birth," and went on reading—"His father was John Snelling, a dissenting minister, and his mother, Jane Crichton, was the daughter of a publican in the neighbourhood. They were married September 30th, 1831."

He stopped reading, while he extracted another paper.

"This is the certificate of their marriage."

Here Joey interrupted :

"Bullock, I beg of you to be careful what you are doing. What can this have to do with Captain Crichton?"

Bullock bowed, as counsel would defer to the opinion of the Lord Chief Justice, but went on :

"I am quite prepared to take the consequences. James Snelling was sent to various local schools, and was expelled from them all. At the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to a surgeon in Leeds, and in his twentieth year was appointed surgeon to the —th Hussars. He served two years in England, and one year in Ireland, after which he accompanied his regiment to India."

"I have," he said, opening another paper, "documentary evidence of all facts and dates, in case Captain Crichton wishes to dispute anything I may say."

He paused and looked at Crichton, who had resumed his attitude of unconcern, and remained silent. He then went on with his narrative, somewhat to this effect :

"After serving at various stations in India, he was sent up with his regiment to take part in one of the border wars on the north-west frontier. The entire force was led into an ambuscade, and narrowly escaped being cut to pieces. The loss of British and native troops was very heavy, and those that escaped owed their lives chiefly to the exertions of the gallant officer in command of the cavalry, who covered their retreat with the loss of more than half his men.

"At the opening of the engagement, James Snelling absconded from the field, and, being summoned before a court martial, after the disaster, he excused his cowardice on the ground that he retired to the rear as soon as he saw that he was the only doctor left alive, so as to be in readiness to attend to the wounded when they were brought in. Although this excuse, such as it was, was accepted by the court, the indignation aroused, not only in his regiment, but throughout the whole service, by his dastardly conduct was such that he was forced to send in his papers.

"James Snelling then returned to England, and, assuming the name of Crichton and the title of Captain, set up as a horse-dealer in Knightsbridge. Here he made the acquaintance of Dawkins, and also of Lord Unwin. The former was in the service of Lord Bulstrode, who, at that time, had several horses in training. One of these was a horse called 'Fly-catcher,' and it is notorious that this horse was poisoned after he had been backed for a large sum of money to win one of the big handicaps of the year. It could be proved up to the hilt that Dawkins shared the profits of this transaction with his two confederates—Lord Unwin and Captain Crichton. Dawkins was dismissed on the spot, but the affair was hushed up by Lord Bulstrode, because Lord Unwin was the son of his sister."

As Bullock paused for breath, Joey reminded him that he was taking very extraordinary proceedings against a gentleman in Captain Crichton's position, and warned him of the responsibility he incurred if unable to prove his accusations. Then, turning to Crichton, he said :

"Have you nothing to say to all this?"

"Nothing," Crichton calmly replied, "except that if you care to listen to such a pack of nonsensical lies you are even a bigger fool than I thought you were. As for Bullock, he bores me excessively. The only excuse I can make for him is that he must be mad."

Bullock bowed again in acknowledgment of the compliment, and folding the document he had been reading, took the next from his bundle.

"It was shortly after this, Mr. Joseph," he went on, "that you met Captain Crichton out with the 'Queen's.' You will remember all about that, so I need not go into details. I will pass on to the time when he introduced you to Lord Unwin, and you accepted the mastership of these hounds. The interest that Captain Crichton took at that time in your affairs, you will remember, was surprising, and, to all outward appearances, most unselfish; but I think you will see by the following items that it was not so surprisingly unselfish after all. It was Captain Crichton recommended every tradesman you employed, and, I do not suppose you noticed it at the time, Mr. Joseph, he never allowed you to employ one that he had not recommended. I have here a list of a number of articles showing the price you paid for them, and the commission paid by the tradesman you bought them of to Captain Crichton. First of all we will begin with the dog-cart and cob Mrs. Spinks gave you on your birthday. That was before you took the hounds, but I will read out the items as I have them written down—and, mind, I have only put down those commissions that I

can prove were offered and accepted, for it is by no means an easy matter to find out these little trade secrets."

He then unfolded a paper and began to read slowly, dwelling upon each item. The items were put down as follows :—

ARTICLE PURCHASED.	PRICE PAID.	COMMISSION RECEIVED.
Dog-cart	£120	£30
Cob for ditto ...	84	25
Saddlery and harness...	214	72
Boot-maker... ..	30	7
Tailor	60	23
Twelve horses ...	1,876	509
Furniture	353	60
Ironmonger	43	17
Carriage builder ...	413	100
Painters and glaziers } sent to Bosby }	17	3
Picture frames ...	55	20

"That's just a few of 'em as I can answer for being correct, leaving out the shillings and pence. Now, what has Captain Crichton got to say?"

Bullock folded his papers, tied them up, and looked steadily at his enemy.

"Now," he repeated, "what has Captain Crichton got to say? I denounce him as a coward, a blackleg, a swindler, and a thief!"

Crichton had become very pale, and it was with an evident effort to maintain his composure that he replied:

"Merely that I intend to prosecute you for malicious libel."

Joey, who had been listening in amazement to Bullock's indictment, could contain himself no longer. Starting from his chair, he cried:

"Talk of prosecuting afterwards, if you like, Crichton, but swear to me first, on your honour as a gentleman, that there is not a word of truth in all this."

"On my honour as a gentleman," said Crichton, "I swear it is the most damnable pack of lies ever invented."

Joey turned to Bullock :

"Now, Bullock, what are you going to do ?"

"Read you this letter, Mr. Joseph," he replied, taking a letter that had not formed part of the bundle from his pocket.

"Please do not be longer than you can help," said Crichton, affecting to stifle a yawn ; "this newspaper is far less dull than your prosing."

Bullock began to read—

"Laburnum House,

"St. John's Wood.

"DEAR SIR,—When you sent me the cheque for 500 guineas on receiving the four landscapes which you bought of me, I wrote thanking you for your generosity.

"I told Captain Crichton, when he first approached me on the subject, that such was the price for the four pictures ; but on his representing that the sum was quite beyond your means, and altogether out of the question, I agreed, being much in want of money at the time, to take £300. My surprise, therefore, was only exceeded by my gratitude when I received your cheque for the sum I originally asked. Imagine then my horror and disgust when I received, a week later, a letter from your friend and agent, peremptorily demanding £225, which sum he asserted was due to him as his commission on the transaction. My first impulse was to put his letter in the fire and return you the balance of the money ; but on second thoughts I sent Captain Crichton what he demanded under protest, saying that I considered myself at liberty to mention the matter to anyone if I thought fit. I was sorely puzzled to know what further steps I was bound as a gentleman to take in the matter. The commission business is a widespread evil, and many seem unable to distin-

guish between the legitimate charges of an authorised agent and the bribe paid secretly to the agent of the other contracting party.

"By a strange accident I came across your old servant, George Bullock, and from him got to know certain things which decided my course of action.

"I entrust this letter to him to show you whenever he thinks best, and thus relieve my conscience of a burden which has caused me much anxiety and sorrow.

"I remain, dear sir, yours truly,

"F. ROMNEY HUXSTABLE."

Bullock handed the letter to Joey. The envelope was addressed "J. Spinks, Esq., care of Mr. George Bullock." There could be no doubt it was genuine, the writing was peculiar, and the signature unmistakable. Joey remembered it well. A kind of nightmare came over him; he was like a man who, while exploring some secret subterraneous passage, hears the spring-door close behind him with a snap. The draught has blown out his candle, and he has no matches. In breathless horror, straining his eyeballs to pierce the darkness, he runs his trembling fingers over the cold walls. Is there no latch—no hope of escape?

"Crichton," he cried, "I implore you to speak; you must be able to give some explanation!"

A man who lives by his wits should be prepared for any turn of fortune. Days of feasting are followed by periods of starvation, and his principle is to accumulate stores as rapidly as possible during the time of plenty, to tide over the next term of privation.

Crichton congratulated himself on his success. The inevitable had come to pass sooner than he had expected, but it was pleasant to think he had made the most of his time. It was to be regretted that the hunting had been a failure. On that point, but on that point alone, he had

been outwitted. It was from a pecuniary point of view that the whole affair was so thoroughly satisfactory. He doubted if it were worth while to go on with the game, for whether Bullock could prove anything or not, Joey's suspicions were aroused, and there was nothing more to be got out of him. If his bird had escaped, at any rate he was well plucked, and before long another of even better plumage might be caught. Nevertheless, the game was not lost before it was won. There were a good many flaws in the indictment of which he could take full advantage. As for a commission, it was the custom of the trade, and all the tradesmen would swear black and blue that they never gave any. It was fifty to one against Bullock. Whatever happened he had Lord Winterfield pretty well under his thumb, and a lien on the gilded balls of a coronet was worth something.

Thus Crichton rapidly reviewed his position. Shame did not form part of his composition—any particle of that commodity that he might have inherited from his grandparents had been long absorbed by the stronger components of his system.

"Why, my dear Spinks," he said, in answer to Joey's last appeal, "should I explain? It is for Bullock to do that. Do not pray throw yourself into such a violent state of agitation. Look at me! surely if anyone should be agitated it is myself. I am as cool as a cucumber."

He certainly was, and his assurance shook the pyramid of evidence that Bullock had piled up.

But Bullock had one more stone with which to bring the pyramid to a point. He took out another letter—his last—and handed it to Joey. It was Crichton's letter to Mr. Huxstable.

"Crichton," said Joey, after he had scrutinised it from end to end, "you cannot possibly deny that that is your handwriting."

"I have no intention of denying it," Crichton coolly replied. "I was a fool ever to have written it. Never, my dear Spinks, write anything. But I am surprised at you. Do you suppose I can live on nothing? If I take the trouble to buy pictures for you, someone must take the trouble to make it worth my while. That's business, and if you weren't an ass you would have known it. Your father must have been a better business man than you are."

The colour went from Joey's face; his muscles twitched and grew rigid. It was with a great effort that he controlled himself and said:

"Leave the room! My carriage will take you to the train to-day at any hour you like to order it."

Crichton laughed as he rose from his chair.

"Certainly, my dear fellow, I shall be happy to avail myself of your kind offer. I will take another cigar, if you don't mind, to smoke on the way."

He filled his case from Joey's cigar box, and strolled across the room. As he went out of the door he turned round.

"Good-bye, Spinks; many thanks for your hospitality. I have enjoyed myself immensely. Say good-bye to your mother for me."

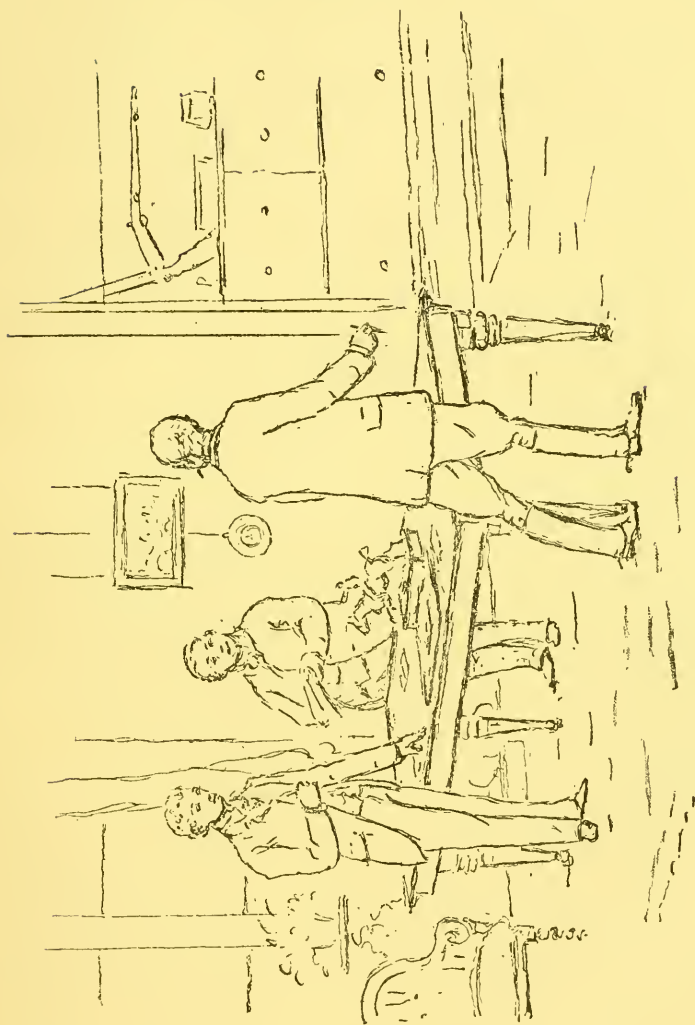
Bullock wanted to follow him to see that "the Cap-ting" didn't take the spoons.

"He is not such a fool as that," said Joey, as he rang the bell.

"Send Dawkins here," he said to the footman who answered the bell, and then sat down at his writing-table and took out his cheque-book.

Dawkins presently appeared, and smilingly awaited his orders for the day.

"You will go with Captain Crichton to the station this afternoon."



"Yes, sir."

"He will let you know what hour."

"Yes, sir."

"The one-horse brougham with the basket on the top."

"Yes, sir ; what horse shall I take, sir ?"

"The big brown horse will take you."

"Yes, sir."

"One of the grooms will drive you."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"If you have anything you cannot take with you, it can be sent after you."

Dawkins ceased smiling. There was a moment of intense silence, broken by the sound of a cheque parting from its counterfoil.

"Here is what I owe you, and a month's wages," said Joey, holding the cheque towards Dawkins.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the latter, taking the cheque.

"It means that you are no longer my servant."

"I won't take it!"

"Then leave it," and Joey pointed to the door.

"What have I done to be treated like this?" Dawkins exclaimed, with a very common-place attempt at affecting injured innocence. He was a poor actor compared with Crichton. "Bullock, you know what this means!"

"It means 'Fly-catcher' Mr. Dawkins, and nothing else. I don't want you to think that the wrong you did me years ago—and it was as cruel a wrong as one man can do another—has had anything to do with your losing your place. I have never said one word about that to a living soul. If I had known about the Fly-catcher business when you first came here, all this would never have happened. Now, go! and never let me see your face again."

Dawkins retreated, shoving the cheque into his breeches pocket, as Bullock followed him towards the door. His heels tripped over the mat, and he staggered backwards through the doorway.

"Now, Bullock," said Joey, "you can look after the spoons!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

As soon as Mary Brain heard that Peters was ill at her father's house, she decided to leave Spetchley; for her father, who had never had a day's illness in his life, she insisted, knew nothing of the requirements of an invalid; there were a hundred and one little things he would never think of, and that Mrs. Peters, if she thought of them, would not like to ask for. So she returned home accompanied by Jessie Bond, who was easily persuaded by her friend to pay her a return visit.

This move on Miss Bond's part upset the calculations of Lord Winterfield, who had made up his mind to prosecute his suit with renewed vigour. He rode over two days in succession on the pretence of enquiring after Peters' health, but, failing on each occasion to gain admittance to the house, or even to set eyes on the real object of his visit, he came to the conclusion he could spend his time more profitably in other pursuits, and so betook himself to the metropolis.

It was the third day from that on which Peters had been carried into Mr. Brain's house, and the doctor had promised Joey that he should see the invalid. The sun shone cheerfully through the open window of the sick-room, and the air was fragrant with flowers from Bosby Hall. Mrs. Peters sat beside the bed with her needle-work, wishing that Miss Brain—who was the only other person allowed to enter the room—would not walk about. Why was she constantly looking out of the window?

Presently a light came into the girl's blue eyes ; she turned from the window and sat down. A minute later the sound of horse's hoofs was heard outside on the gravel.

"That'll be Mr. Spinks," said Peters, and his wife looked across the bed at Mary Brain, and, although the girl sat with her back to the window, detected the blush upon her cheek. Mrs. Peters' feelings towards Joey had undergone an entire change during the past two days, and now the matchmaking instincts of her sex were gratified by an important discovery.

The meeting of Joey and Peters was none the less affecting because it was silent. Mrs. Peters, carefully dusting the chair on which she had been sitting, offered it to "the master," as she now called him for the first time. Peters smiled on Joey, he smiled on Mary Brain, she blushed and smiled on Mrs. Peters, who stood smiling on them all.

Joey was the first to break the silence.

"I'm sorry to hear, Peters, that you were rambling in the night."

"Which night?" Peters asked, with a suspicion of mistrust in his voice.

"Last night."

"Oh ! was I?" said Peters, "well, it wasn't intentional, Mr. Spinks ;" and they all laughed.

Then Joey related the story of Bullock and Crichton, which was listened to with breathless interest.

"I always thought him an odious man," exclaimed Miss Brain, when the story came to an end, "and have often wondered what you could see in him."

Peters said nothing, but it was not difficult to see he was well pleased with the course of events ; while his better half looked as if she would gladly have taken an active part in the scene she had heard described.

Joey rattled on about his hounds and the wonderful run, which he declared was nothing to what he expected to see as soon as Peters was well enough to hunt the hounds. "For you will come back again," he asked, with some anxiety, "won't you, Peters?"

"If you think I can do it as well as 'the Capting,'" said Peters, "I don't mind trying; though the doctor says as I shan't be fit to ride much before the 1st. But look here, Mr. Spinks, why don't you take them out yourself? You can do it easy enough. The hounds have too much sense to leave you after that last run, and they won't be so difficult to manage now the Capting's gone. You take my word for it, Mr. Spinks, it was all his fault."

Hunt the hounds himself! The suggestion was captivating, intoxicating. He would try; he would go out alone with the whips, and no one need know of his shortcomings if he failed.

He wished Peters goodbye, for he had suddenly become anxious that the invalid should not over-exert himself by too much talking, and hurried away as if he was going to take the hounds out there and then. But Miss Brain went with him to the front door, and somehow he forgot about the hounds. Had he seen the fox that the keeper found? It was down by the garden. The poor thing had been trapped! It was the prettiest fox she had ever seen. Joey said he would like to see it; so they went together down the garden. There was a great deal to be seen besides the fox, although at that time of year the garden, of course, was not looking its best. There was her own garden that she cultivated when quite a little girl; some of the cockle-shells were still to be seen. The whole garden now was entirely in her charge. There were the violet beds; she was glad Joey was fond of violets; they were her favourite flowers—and she pulled a nosegay and put it in his button-hole. There was a deodara, planted

the day she was born. Joey looked at the tree and then at her and declared it was almost incredible. The time slipped by, and they were surprised to hear the luncheon bell; her mother would never forgive him if he didn't stay to lunch, so he could not refuse to stay.

Jessie Bond wanted to know where they had been all the morning. Looking at the fox—for two hours!

Mr. Brain came in in the middle of lunch, and said they were felling a big tree close by. It was a sight worth seeing. So they hurried off to see the grand crash. From there they went to see the live stock, and the hackney that had just taken another first prize; thence through the stables and back home to tea.



The next day Joey came over again to see Peters, and asked after the poor fox's foot. He and Mary Brain went down the garden to assure themselves that it was

really better ; and so on day after day till the poor foot got quite well, and still they went to see the fox.

One morning Joey arrived late. Mrs. Peters knew why Miss Brain was so anxious to arrange the window-blind to keep the sun off Peters' face. He came in triumphant ; he had killed his first fox, and brought more flowers and grapes for Peters. Mary Brain said it was so kind of him, and everyone agreed with her. At last the day came when the doctor pronounced his patient convalescent and fit to return to Bosby.

"I am afraid," said Joey, who was present when the announcement was made, "that his house is not ready for him yet. He can come to 'the Hall' of course, but I can't allow him to go back to his cottage."

"That would never do," said Miss Bond. So it was arranged that Peters should stay where he was till his house at the kennels was finished.

These were happy days for Joey, cub-hunting in the morning, love-making in the afternoon. The hounds were getting to know him, so were the foxes, and he was beginning to blow his horn like a professional. Every now and then, if he lost sight of his hounds, his past misfortunes rushed upon him like a nightmare, and he became almost demented till he saw them again. His thoughts, too, sometimes wandered, in spite of the excitement of the chase, and he found himself casting his hounds back towards Mary Brain. The whips agreed he would never make a huntsman. He hadn't the patience for it, and was always too anxious to get home.

One afternoon, early in the last week of October, Joey ran a fox to ground not far from Mr. Brain's, and, leaving the whips to take the hounds back to the kennels, went off to tell Peters that his house was finished and ready for him to go into.

It was a lovely day, and he found Peters seated in a

wicker chair under the cedar on the lawn, with Mrs. Brain and the two girls. Mrs. Peters, who was watching them from the house, declared they would spoil him.

Mary Brain was reading "Handley Cross" aloud, but ceased reading and looked up as Joey advanced towards them.

"I have some news for you, Peters," he said, after he had greeted them all round; "your house is ready, and Mr. Johnson is coming to stay at 'the Hall' for the beginning of the hunting season. He arrives to-morrow afternoon, and I want you to be back in your old place to receive him when he comes."

Mary Brain could understand Peters being pleased, but was disappointed—though she would not confess it, even to herself—that Mr. Spinks seemed so delighted to get him away from them.

"But I beg your pardon for interrupting," Joey went on. "Please Miss Brain go on reading. Where have you got to? Oh! 'the pig and mustard-pot day'—that's splendid!"

But she insisted that Joey should read. So, taking the book, he went on with the inimitable tale, that he—like many another sportsman—knew almost by heart. Now and again he stopped, after some favourite passage, to see its effect upon his audience. Jessie Bond was in fits of laughter, Mary Brain thought it never sounded so well as when read aloud, while Peters put in explanatory notes drawn from his own experience.

"Why don't you laugh, Peters?" said Joey, in one of his pauses; "don't you think it's splendid?"

"Well, it's only a take-off, Mr. Spinks; it never really happened."

"It never actually happened, and perhaps it couldn't happen; but didn't old Jorrocks understand about hunting?"



"He knew about hunting, certainly," replied the old huntsman, as if that were a matter of course, and hardly worth mentioning; "but he didn't know a bit more than you will know in a very short time."

"But think, Peters, how difficult it must be to write about hunting so that you can't find fault with it."

The literary point was lost on Peters, and he made no answer.

"What strikes me," said Jessie Bond, wiping the tears from her eyes, "is that all the characters are either scoundrels or idiots—or both; there's not a decent person among the lot."

"They are all like that," said Mary Brain, "in 'Soapy Sponge,' and the rest of his books. Surtees does not seem to have cared to describe respectable humdrum people."

"But respectable people need not be humdrum," Jessie Bond objected.

"And old Jorrocks isn't a scoundrel," pleaded Joey; "and he is far from being an idiot. I am very fond of him."

"At any rate, Mr. Spinks, he is not very *distingué*;" said Jessie Bond, and appealed to Mrs. Brain for her opinion.

"I expect," said that lady, "that Peters is about right. The whole thing is a 'take-off,' and meant to be humorous. There is more humour to be got out of people of that sort, because they make themselves ridiculous, in our eyes at any rate. How could you make fun of Mr. Marshall, for instance? You might laugh at what he said, but you could not laugh at him. And he would be quite out of his element in society at Handley Cross."

"I should like to see him there," said Joey. "I'll be bound old Jorrocks would treat him like a gentleman!"

"It seems to me," said Mary Brain, "that Mr. Spinks believes old Jorrocks is alive and hunting his hounds, and perhaps trying to pull Artaxerxes over a fence at this very moment."

"Of course he is," said Joey; "he's immortal."

"But I say, Peters," he went on, turning to the old huntsman, "why don't you write the history of your life and adventures in the hunting-field?"

“No, Mr. Spinks, I ain’t scholard enough for that ; and as for my adventures, they are varied in one way, for every fox, every hound and every horse is various, and there is always something new to say about him ; and every run is various, but it don’t sound so when you come to write it down. It’s like this : ‘ Left this covert on the right, that on the left ; turned right-handed by so-and-so, and then left-handed after we passed t’other place ; or may be went straight on till we came somewhere else, and there he was headed in a ploughed field or chased by a shepherd’s dog ; but hitting it off again we ran through here, there, and everywhere, when he got to ground in a rabbit-hole, and we had him out ; or in a drain, and we bolted him ; or in the main earth, and we guv’ it up.’ It’s all very well talking about a run, no matter how long ago it was, to some one who was there—that is very interesting ; but I don’t know nothing stupider than reading or hearing a long account of a run you wasn’t in, through a country you knows nothing about, and at the end of it the gentleman what tells the story slaps his leg and says : ‘ Believe me, it was eighteen miles from point to point, and two hours and ten minutes without a check.’ And who is there can contradict him when he says there was no one in it but him ? No—I have kep’ a diary ever since I hunted these hounds, but that’s for my own efferdication ; and as I don’t want to read other people’s fox-hunting diarees, I don’t expect no one to read mine.”

These sentiments—however they may be regarded by our reader—were strongly combated by Joey and his fellow listeners, who declared themselves devoured by curiosity to peruse the manuscript.

“Now, Mr. Peters, look at me,” said Miss Bond (those eyes would have subjugated a more stubborn heart than the old huntsman’s ;) “I want you to do me a favour. I want you to describe, from start to finish, just as if I had

been there, and you were only reminding me exactly of what happened, the best run you ever saw in your life."

Who could have refused?

The sun, however, was getting low, and it grew chilly. A general move was made for the house, and there, while the others seated themselves once more round Peters, in anticipation of his tale, Mary Brain slipped away to order tea for the company, and two poached eggs for Mr. Spinks.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE morning that followed Peters' description of the best run he had ever seen in his life (we shall always regret we were not there to hear it) saw him back at the kennels.

His house had been papered and whitewashed from top to bottom ; the cat was in his old place on the window-sill ; the canary sang as if the spring had come again, and Galloper II. was in danger of going off his head from excess of joy. And yet there was something wrong.

As the days went past Peters found he couldn't bear himself, so it is no wonder all about him found him unbearable. The whips had heard a good deal of his temper, but this surpassed all previous experiences of huntsmen's tempers. His wife could do nothing to please him ; even Sam was in perpetual hot water.

It was very strange, pondered the latter, how some folks never could be happy. They worried themselves to death to get something, and when they got it they worried themselves and everybody else worse than if they had never got it.

Matters were not mended by daily visits from Mr. Johnson, and continued discussions on the subject of "the mystery." For the first time in his life Peters found he could not look Mr. Johnson in the face, and the question, "Who can have done it, Peters ?"—implying that

Peters himself was above suspicion—became more painful each time it was repeated.

Peters had been congratulating himself that he had gone through the whole business without telling a single direct falsehood. His truthfulness, thus qualified, was immaculate. Even as regards Simpson and his sheepskins had he been careful not to assert that any hounds had been lost, but only to say that it was not unlikely that some hounds might come that way. This record was not easy to maintain against such direct questions as “Who do you think did it, Peters?” He could not say he did not know, and had no one to suggest except Sam.

As the question became more and more difficult to parry, Peters became more and more ashamed of himself; and the more his shame increased the worse his temper grew.

His discontent with himself and everything connected with the Hunt, reached a climax on the morning of November 4th, when he arrayed himself for “the opening meet” in the new coat, new breeches, and new boots—all paid for by Mr. Spinks. He would have given anything to have been allowed to put on his old clothes.

He went into the kennel yard and called one of the whips. “Saddle the old brown mare!”

“The chestnut mare and the bay horse is got ready for you,” said Sam, who was within hearing.

“Do what I tell you, and look sharp about it.”

So saying, Peters went towards the kennels. Sam followed and found him in an attitude of dejection in the boiling-house. He was inhaling the beloved atmosphere for the last time.

“You ain’t going to ride that old mare, Peters, at the opening meet?”

“Yes, I am; for I shan’t ride her at another.”

“But why ride her at all?”



"Why? 'cos I promised her a day's hunting before she knocked under, and this is going to be her only chance."

"You're not going to put her in the boiler?"

"Sam," said Peters looking mournfully at his old friend, "I'm going to resign."

For the first time in his life Sam's eyes came into focus, and he stared at Peters, wondering if he had gone mad, while the latter went on: "No, Sam, I can't stand it any longer; these new boots and breeches has finished it. They will be the death of me. Even the bread I eat chokes me. I mean to make a clean breast of it."

"What!" exclaimed Sam, "tell Mr. Spinks?"

Peters nodded assent.

"But you can't be such a fool as that! Do you mean

to say as you are going to give it up after all you have been through to get it ? Then all I can say is, you are a stark staring lunatic, as ought to be put in a straight waistcoat ! ”

No argument, no abuse or expostulation produced the slightest effect.

“ And where am I to go to,” asked Sam at last, when all his other arguments had failed ; “ where am I to go to after I gets the sack ? ”

The certainty of Sam’s dismissal following immediately upon his intended confession, had not occurred to Peters. Here was a puzzle. He had no right, whatever he did, to make Sam suffer as well as himself.

The old mare was ready for him, but he still debated in his own mind what he ought to do.

“ Let out the hounds, Sam,” he said at length, “ I won’t tell Mr. Spinks nothing. I shall resign my place, and refuse to give any reason for doing so.”

“ Don’t, Peters, don’t do that ! Where will you get another place ? What can you turn a hand to at your time of life ? ”

“ I’ve thought out all that, Sam. I shall go to London and drive a cab.”

Peters left the boiling-house, and went towards the old mare, who hinnied as he approached. He patted her neck, and looked her over before he mounted.

Sam went to the kennel gate where the hounds were whining and leaping in expectation of their release. “ And if he drives a cab in London,” he muttered to himself, “ he’ll want some one to wash it for him ; ” and the hounds rushed tumultuously forth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was a goodly crowd assembled at the Hall. The guests were passing in and out of the house. Their host was here, there, and everywhere, pressing the shy and hungry to the feast. Coats of every colour, red, green, and black, the brown velveteen and the white smock were bidden and made welcome. The drive was thronged with carriages overflowing with beauty, and beyond the stables the feasters' horses were being led to and fro.

The hounds took up their station on the lawn; and Joey, with his own hand, filled Peters' glass and drank a bumper to his health.

"Good morning, Colonel!" said Joey, as the dapper little Colonel Rideabout joined them; "you are very smart this morning!"

"Smart? my dear Spinks, my old coat looks very dowdy by the side of yours. By Jove! turn round, let us have a look at you—who made it? Egad! you're as well turned out as ever I saw anyone. Ah! when I was your age I had some use for a new coat; I could ride a bit then. You know how shortsighted I have always been? I could never see what I was riding at, and as sure as ever I went into the mess after a day's hunting, one of our fellows would say to me, 'My dear Rideabout, what were you thinking of, going over that place to-day?' when, I assure you, I wasn't aware I had been over any place worth mentioning!"

"Y-ou are q-uite right," said Parkes, who had just

come out from breakfast, slapping the Colonel on the back, "to b-be more careful, now that you're a f-amily man ! What have you d-done with the old m-mare that used to c-carry you so well ?"

"My old brown mare ? She wasn't safe to ride over timber—gone in the fore-legs—I had to send her to the kennels."

Peters smiled, and, leaning forward, patted the old mare's neck, wondering if the Colonel would know his own mother if he came across her unexpectedly.

"Good scenting day !" said the Colonel with an air of authority, as if challenging contradiction. "Don't you say so, Peters ?"

"I'll tell you, Colonel, about that, after we have found our first fox."

"By the bye," exclaimed Joey, turning to Parkes, "I mustn't forget to thank you for the mask and brush. They came this morning. I can't understand how they got them done so quickly."

"I suspect s-ome foxes are easier to stuff than others," said Parkes, winking at Peters, who tried to look as if he hadn't heard what they were saying.

"But, I say, Parkes," Joey continued, "you shouldn't have had 'killed by J. Spinks' put on the plate, because Peters really killed him."

"P-perhaps he did, s-trictly speaking ; but you were the only one who was with hounds all through the run."

It was time to throw off, but Joey still lingered among his hounds, casting frequent glances across the park, and consulting his watch from time to time, as one who impatiently awaits the arrival of some large subscriber to the Hunt. At length his face brightened, and telling Peters to jog on with the hounds without waiting for him, he hastened to join Mrs. Spinks, who was standing on the steps in front of the house,

“And there was mounting in hot haste : the steed,
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,
Went pouring forward with impetuous speed,”

on their way to covert.

“Isn’t she lovely ?” Joey whispered to his mother, as Miss Brain and her father threaded their way towards them through the moving crowd.

“You don’t mean to say you have waited for us,” exclaimed Miss Brain ; “how kind of you ! I am dreadfully sorry we are so late. Just as we were starting a man called to see father about some timber—I thought we should never get rid of him !”

Joey was soon mounted and in pursuit of the hounds, assuring his fair companion by the way that the pleasure of his opening-day would have been spoiled if she had not come. In a few minutes, they overtook Lord Winterfield riding with Miss Bond in the rear of the cavalcade, and, leaving his companions, Joey pushed on to join Peters in the van.

There was no difficulty about “finding.” In the first ten minutes there were four or five foxes on foot, and as many throats holloaing themselves hoarse in every direction. Some of the young hounds, and every one of Crichton’s draft, paying no attention to Peters’ horn, were running various lines all over the covert. Peters got away with about half the pack, but only for a short distance, as his fox, headed on all sides, was soon back again in the wood where he was found. Four couple of hounds went away with another fox, without anyone attempting to stop them. The cracking of thongs, the noise made by the whips rating the hounds, the constant holloaing, and the galloping up and down of horsemen increased the confusion. Peters, finding it impossible to steady his hounds, or to bring their noses to the ground, swore at the whips, abused “the field,” and, in short, lost

his temper completely. If the hounds hunted for fifty yards, as sure as ever they came to a ride in the covert there were a dozen horses standing on the line.

This state of things had lasted for half an hour or more, when there was a roar from the carriages on the high-road. "Tally-ho—over—over—over." Anxious to get away from the woods and to escape the crowd, Peters galloped to the holloa! There sat Bullock in a field beyond the road, waving his hat. "Tally-ho, for'ard," he cried, as the hounds streamed over the road. The carriage-horses snorted and pranced, the occupants of the carriages clapped their fair hands, delighted to see so much of the sport, and thrilled with excitement as the horsemen came pouring out of the wood on to the road. Then came a scramble for the gaps. Some jumped too big, some jumped short and fell, some backed among the carriages; but those who didn't jump were as well off as those who did, for the fox, after leading the hounds best pace across half-a-dozen fields, took refuge in a drain, whence all efforts to dislodge him failed.

After a consultation, Peters went off after the four couple of hounds that were still missing, and another half-hour was wasted before he met them coming back, having lost their fox, to rejoin their companions.

In order to get rid of the crowd on foot and on wheels, Joey now decided to trot straight away to Whiston Wood. Here they found again at once, but the day was destined to be uneventful as far as sport was concerned, for though holloas were less frequent, and the bulk of the hounds hunted steadily enough, there was hardly any scent, and they could not force the fox, press him as they would, to break covert.

For two hours he dodged about, sometimes almost amongst the hounds, laughing in his vulpine sleeve at his pursuers, and at length stole away unseen, and soon ran them out of scent.

The only chance now was to leave the woods, so Joey trotted off still further from home into a more open country. Here Crichton's draft, which had been running riot all day, whenever there was an opportunity, had to be whipped off a hare, and eventually, when a fox was found, the scent proved worse, if possible, than it was before, and after dragging on for an hour or so they gave it up.

"You must get rid of them hounds," said Peters to Joey, as they rode home together. "They'll never do any good now—it's too late to teach 'em. Hounds properly bred, properly broken and entered at the proper time in the proper way will never look at anything but a fox. The young hounds haven't had a chance, how could they? We are only just beginning cub-hunting. By this time we ought by rights to have killed eight or nine brace, and we have only killed one fox."

"Two," said Joey; "I killed one."

"Yes, you killed one; and that's the one I'm counting."

"But you killed another—the day you were taken ill—the one Parkes had mounted for me."

"That fox," said Peters, looking solemnly in front of him, "was five years old, Mr. Spinks!"

"Is that a great age for a fox," asked Joey, after reflecting for some time how the age of a fox could possibly affect the fact of his being killed.

"I mean, Mr. Spinks, that that 'ere fox had been dead five years—that was the second time I killed him."

He paused, and as Joey was too bewildered to speak, went on:

"I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mr. Spinks, but I must give up. I'm too old, my health is not what it was, and my spirits is all gone. I ain't fit for the place, and you must get a younger man than me, and a better one."

"Nonsense," replied Joey, partly recovered from his surprise. "You have a fit of the blues because we have had a bad day's sport. What does it matter? You can't help there being a bad scent; you haven't yet recovered your strength, and I daresay a long day in the saddle has been too much for you."

"No, sir; you are very kind to make excuses for me, but all that has nothing to do with it, I must give up."

"There is some joke, Peters, that I don't understand."

"Some people might think it a joke, but it's a very poor one for me."

"Come, Peters, tell me what it's all about. What has put you out?"

"Nothing."

"Has anyone offended you? Have you quarrelled with the whips?"

"No, nobody has offended me, and the whips is like the rest of them—they are very nice young men, but they've got to learn their business."

"Are you in want of money?" asked Joey, as it occurred to him that Peters had been out of place some time and might have run into debt; "if so, I shall be only too glad to give you as much as you want."

"Thank you all the same, Mr. Spinks, but I have had too much of your money already. I have said all I've got to say, and that is I must give up."

"Come, Peters, this is hardly fair; you must give me some reason."

"Can't give no reasons."

"Why not?"

"Because if I gives my reasons someone else will lose his place."

"Do you mean Bullock?"

Peters shook his head.

"Sam?"

Peters nodded.

"Nonsense, Peters ; turn away dear old Sam ! I would almost as soon think of turning you away."

"And so you would, sir, me and Sam too, if I gave my reasons. So, you will excuse me, it makes no difference to you if I don't tell them."

"I never heard such rot in my life. Look here ! If I give you my word of honour that your reasons shall not make the slightest difference to Sam, will you tell me what they are ?"

"No, Mr. Spinks."

"Confound it !" exclaimed Joey, losing patience with the old man's obstinacy. "Why not ?"

"Because it ain't in human nature but what you couldn't forgive him."

"Forgive him what ?"

"That is just what I don't intend to say."

"Do you mean that you do not trust my promise ?"

"Of course I trust your promise, but you don't know what it is you are promising."

"Very well, Peters, I will take your word for it. Sam has done something that obliges me to part with him ; and I will give him notice to-morrow morning. He will have to look to you for an explanation."

"Now, Mr. Spinks," cried Peters, distracted by the unexpected turn matters had taken, "don't do that ! I will stop with you if you will promise me you won't do that."

"That's a bargain," exclaimed Joey, delighted at the success of his diplomacy.

"But I cannot possibly stay on without telling you, Mr. Spinks, and, as I said before, if I tell you I can't stop."

"Come, Peters, let's have it ?"

The struggle was nearly over. The shame of confession, and the anxiety for Sam's welfare, were rapidly giving way to the desire of clearing his conscience.

"You will remember your promise about Sam?"

"If I don't, I swear never to get outside a horse again."

"Then listen, Mr. Spinks, and don't interrupt me till I'm done.

"To begin with, I want you to believe that it was all for the good of the hounds; whatever my feelings had to do with it, I don't believe I should ever have done what I did if it hadn't been for those blessed dogs. When I was down in the village yonder, every time I heard them bay-ing, I used to think they was a-calling me to their deliver-ance, and when I once got that idea into my head it seemed to stick there, and, do what I could, it began to grow; and I had nothing to think about but them, and the more I listened to them the worse it got, till I thought I should go out of my mind. And Sam used to come down and tell me about the Capting, and while he was talking I used to think I could tell old Galloper's voice above the rest; and then he told me about this old mare—and that's the only part of the whole business I ain't ashamed of, for I believe she has a sort of notion what she was sent to the kennels for. Haven't you ever seen a bullock running away from the butcher when he comes to look at him in the field? It's the smell of the blood, that's what that is, Mr. Spinks. And when Sam went away I used to whistle to try and keep the thoughts out of my head, and prevent 'em growing bigger, but the whistling made no difference, and my missus used to ask me what I was always whistling about, and why I couldn't stop that stupid noise—meaning the whistling, not the hounds. Then Mr. Marshall would come and see me, and I felt better for a day or two; but it didn't last, and when Sam told me how the hounds was going to Whiston Wood the next morning I told him to bring down the old mare—mind, I don't say he knew what I wanted her for. But what's the use of me saying any more? You can guess what happened."

"Indeed, I cannot," Joey said, as Peters seemed disinclined to resume his narrative. "You have only told me enough to make me heartily ashamed of myself, to think that I could have treated you with such thoughtless cruelty. Get on with your story ; I want to hear what happened."

Peters began again :

"Well, I got on the old mare, and went off to see Simpson. He had had a quarrel with me, you know, because he didn't get the prize for the pup he walked last year ; but that weren't my fault—the pup Miss Brain had was better than his, and so the gentleman what Mr. Johnson got down to judge the pups, gave her the prize——"

"Does Miss Brain take puppies to walk ?" said Joey, forgetting his promise not to interrupt.

"Walk pups ! I believe she'd hunt the hounds if you gave her half a chance. But that ain't got nothing to do with my story. If Simpson hadn't left that calf hanging about and had kep' his door shut he wouldn't have lost nothing——"

A light broke in on Joey's mind, and in another minute he knew that Peters was at the bottom of the mystery. Still, careful not to interrupt again, he let him go on with his account of the various methods he adopted of abducting the hounds.

The conciseness of his narrative, his comments on his own conduct, and his anxiety to remove suspicion from or justify his accomplices, afforded Joey a sort of entertainment absolutely unique in his, or, as he thought, in any other man's experience.

It was with the greatest difficulty at times that he refrained from laughing, for the comic element of the whole affair was thrown into strong relief by the unfeigned contrition of the principal actor, who, Joey felt, would

deeply resent the thought that his confession could be made a subject for merriment. Joey had, moreover, somewhat the feelings of a parent, who, while listening to the confession of his little first-born, and longing to take him in his arms, feels bound to assume that expression of gravity demanded by the solemnity of the occasion.

"And that fox's head," said Peters, approaching the end of his story, "had been hanging up in my room for five years. Now, you would think, naturally, Mr. Spinks, that having done all this—and it was very wonderful in my opinion how I managed to do it—and got back into my old place, that I would have been as happy as possible; but you can't think how miserable I began to feel as soon as the doctor told me you wanted me to come back to the kennels.

"It was your kindness, and everybody's kindness, as did it. The flowers you brought only reminded me of my wickedness every time I looked at 'em, and when I said I couldn't bear the smell—it was only an excuse to get rid of them—you kep' on bringing a lot more as hadn't got any; and I used to drop the grapes under the bed, or throw them out of the window, when it was open, rather than swallow them.

"Then I comes back home, and instead of getting better I gets worse, till I says to Sam this morning, 'Sam,' says I, 'I'm going to tell Mr. Spinks'; and then I promised him I wouldn't, 'cos he'd lose his place—and there's an end of it—but you won't forget your promise about Sam?"

The old man drew a long breath, as if he had laid down a burden he was unable to carry further, and cast his eyes down on his hounds, looking steadily at each of them in turn, as it were to impress its image more strongly on his memory.

"Well, Peters," said Joey, after he had watched him for some time, "what do you expect me to say?"

"There's nothing to be said, sir, only that I'll stay on if you wish, till you can find another huntsman to take my place."

"No, Peters ; that won't do. I will tell you what conclusion I have come to ; we are quits—you and I—quits."

"That's it, Mr. Spinks, I quits."

"No, Peters, you don't understand. I say we are quits. When I turned you away, I thought I was acting for the good of the hounds, and I was not. You thought you were acting for the good of the hounds, and you were. So far you have the best of it. But I had a right, in a sense, to do what I did, whereas you had no right, in any sense, to do what you did. So as I am at least as much to blame as you are, and it has all turned out for the best, and we have taught one another a lesson neither of us is likely to forget, let us forgive one another and shake hands on it."

Peters withdrew his hand from Joey's to brush away the tears that were coursing down the wrinkles of his cheeks.

"Come, Peters, pull yourself together. We had better shove along a bit."

So saying, Joey called to the whip, who was some distance in front, to trot on.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. BOND had accompanied his daughter to the meet, but had gone home early, leaving her under the charge of Mr. Brain, who promised to take all possible care of her.

When, at the end of the day, Lord Winterfield offered to escort her to Spetchley, as Mr. Brain's road lay in another direction, she accepted his offer without hesitation.

She had of late taken a liking to Lord Winterfield. She was inclined to think she had been hard on him, and that there was no sufficient cause for Mrs. Spink's alarm on her behalf. Besides this, the sorrow of his father's death—for she imagined what her sorrow would be in such a case, and credited him with her own feelings—aroused her sympathy, and she allowed herself to become more interested than was, perhaps, discreet on her part in the fate of one so handsome, so melancholy, and withal so unfortunate.

In spite of the melancholy air which he at times assumed, and which seldom failed to excite the interest it was intended to evoke, Lord Winterfield was generally an amusing as well as an interesting companion.

Crichton's departure, having relieved the immediate pressure which necessitated his making precipitate attacks upon the heiress, allowed him to prosecute his suit with more discretion and a better chance of success. And not being for the moment in want of funds, for his last

visit to the metropolis had been financially a great success, he was all the more inclined to make himself agreeable to Miss Bond, whose marked change of manner towards him in the last few days encouraged and flattered a desire that had taken stronger root than he suspected.

As they trotted gaily along the road on their way home, he was lost in admiration of her beauty. It was not her features, which were by no means perfect; it was not her elegance, nor her colouring—although the enjoyment of the day (for she enjoyed everything—even a bad day's sport)—had given her the complexion of an apple-blossom; nor was it the whiteness of her teeth, betokening good health and a sound constitution; it was the soul of the girl, the beauty of her mind and character rather than of her external form that fascinated him, as it fascinated all who came in contact with her.

He had never been what is called "a ladies' man." A virtuous woman of his own class he had always considered a person to be avoided. If he had troubled himself to win the affections of such, it was where there could be no question of matrimony, and where—if the worst came to the worst—money could be the only compensation offered. The gratification of a passing whim might prove expensive, but after all somebody must get the money, and it were well spent.

As for love, he had known many beautiful women, and more than one had professed to love him with a sort of love which he reciprocated, but here was a strange, another kind of love, a subtle influence stealing in unawares and taking possession—uninvited and, till now, unperceived and unsuspected.

Once before he felt a pang of jealousy when Joey rode off with her in the park at Spetchley. Then he did not

trouble himself to analyse the sensation, but woe betide the man that might come between them now !

Accustomed to success, he never seriously doubted being able to win her love. The opportunity was all he wanted, and now, encouraged by her friendliness and fired by his passion, he resolved to hazard the attempt.

There were, however, other horsemen travelling the same road, who, as they varied their pace, were constantly overtaking them, or being overtaken by them. Lord Winterfield felt it was difficult to make a proposal at a round trot, and it was impossible to say, "Do you mind walking, Miss Bond, till everyone has gone past, and is out of sight, as I wish to make you the offer of my hand in matrimony."



As he was wondering what excuse he could invent to shake off his fellow travellers, his practised ear detected the sound of a loose shoe, and he lost no time in taking

advantage of the accident. On hearing that her horse had a shoe loose Miss Bond pulled up, and her companion, quickly dismounting and lifting her horse's forefoot, managed, by a dexterous wrench, to make it a great deal looser than it already was, assuring her at the same time that no harm would come of it provided she were content to go slowly the rest of the way. When they moved on again the sound of the loose shoe was painfully audible to the inexperienced rider, who, magnifying the possible consequences of losing a shoe altogether, professed her willingness to walk all the way on foot rather than inflict the slightest injury upon her horse.

It was some time before Lord Winterfield, looking behind him, saw that the road was clear, and that there was little chance of interruption.

"Miss Jessie," he began.

She started and looked straight at him. Her clear eyes met his, and a sense of fear, mingled with regret, came over her.

"I have told you," he went on, with a slight tremor in his voice, "how unhappy my life has been—how blighted and loveless. I have sought for love in woman and found dross, and have sometimes thought that there is no such thing as love—at least, none in which I may have a part. The longing that I thought was dead, that lay withered in my heart, revived, Jessie, when I saw you first. It stretched forth its feeble arms and cried to you for pity. You gave it, and I loved you for your sweet compassion. Since then, Jessie——"

"Stop! stop! Lord Winterfield; you must not—you dare not speak to me like this! What have I done that you should say such words to me?"

"I will tell you—you have made me love you. The hope which one unkind word or look from you would have killed for ever you have fostered and encouraged.

You have taught it to turn to you for life. It has grown strong, and now demands what it has been taught to seek."

"I cannot—I will not—hear you. You do not know what you are saying. For pity's sake leave me, or let me go on by myself."

"I cannot, Jessie, till you have heard me, and then I will not, for you will be my own—my wife!"

Miss Bond grew as pale as death. Her eyes literally glowed.

"Lord Winterfield," she said, in a calm voice, that contrasted strangely with her looks, "I am an engaged woman."

Into the rivulet of pure love that trickled, as it were, through the heart of the libertine, jealousy let loose in a moment the turbid flood of his tumultuous passions. The unbridled license of his nature would brook no obstacle in the path of its desires.

"Engaged!" he hissed between his clenched teeth, and then laughed a sinister and godless laugh. "Engaged—yes, to me! for what man will marry you when I tell him you are—as good as my wife? You shall have me! By God, you shall!" and he seized her by the wrist.

In his frenzy he had forgotten where he was, and was unconscious that for some minutes he had been watched.

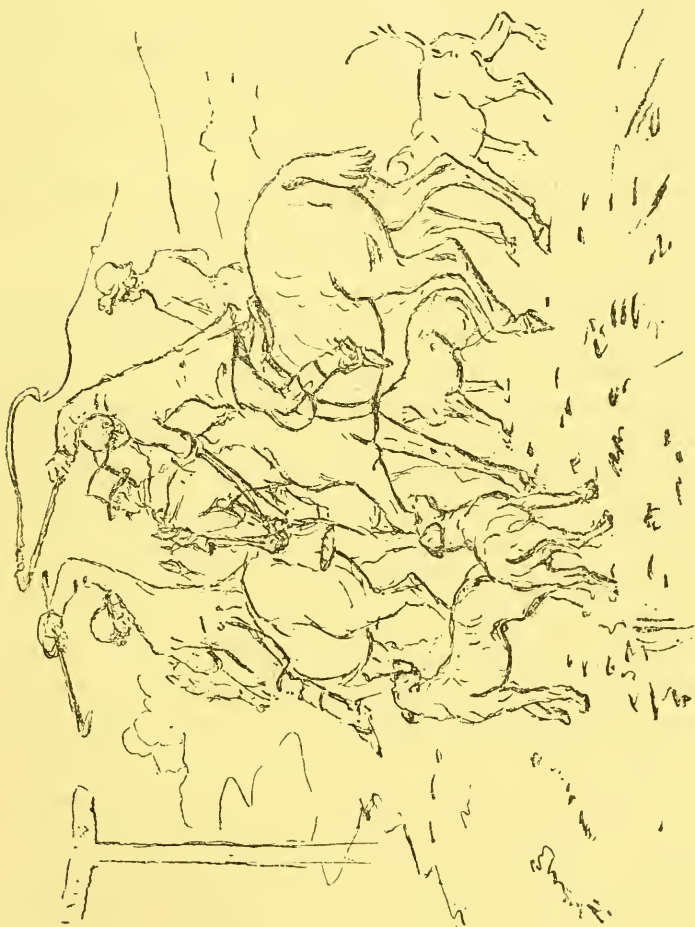
"You had better ride on, sir, and see what Lord Onions is up to," Peters said to Joey; "she seems to be giving his lordship snuff. Depend on it, he don't mean no good by her."

Joey, who had already come to the same conclusion, set spurs to his horse, and keeping on the grass by the roadside, got close up to them unnoticed, just at the moment when Lord Winterfield seized Miss Bond by the wrist.

"Hands off!" he shouted, dashing in between them. "How dare you lay hands on a woman?"

As he reined his horse on to his haunches he came into violent collision with Lord Winterfield.

"Who the devil are you?" exclaimed the latter, making a cut at the intruder with the butt end of his hunting-



crop, which, narrowly missing Joey's head, spent its force upon his horse's neck. Beside himself with rage, Joey raised his hunting-crop and spurred towards his assailant,

whose back was now towards him ; but before the intended blow could descend a tremendous cut from Peters' lash over the quarters of Lord Winterfield's horse, made that animal bound forward, and the crop hissed harmless through the air.

On turning round Lord Winterfield found himself confronted by four resolute-looking men—both the whips were known to be handy with the gloves—and saw at once that it was useless to attempt to chastise Joey on the spot.

"You infernal little hairdresser," he said ; "you shall smart for this," and, so saying, he turned his horse's head and rode off.

A woman of weaker nerves than Jessie Bond would have gone into hysterics. As it was she had to make a great effort to control herself, and could not well express the gratitude she felt towards her deliverer. She thanked him, however, for his timely intervention, and, explaining that she was unable to go fast along the road on account of the loose shoe, asked him to stay and see her safe home.

"Lor ! miss," exclaimed Peters, looking at her horse's foot, "that shoe will keep on till you get home. You had better get along as quick as you can."

Then, turning to the first whip, he told him to accompany Miss Bond and Joey to Spetchley, and on no account to leave the latter before he got back to "The Hall."

Beyond thanking Joey for his kindness, and expressing a hope that he was not hurt, Jessie Bond made no allusion to Lord Winterfield. Joey could only guess what had happened from the pallor of her face, and the agitation which she could not altogether conceal.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EARLY the next morning a messenger called at the inn at Bosby with a note for the Earl of Winterfield from Mrs. Spinks, requesting him to call upon her as soon as he could make it convenient. The note gave no hint as to the purpose of the interview, and Lord Winterfield concluded that the writer was anxious about her son's curly head, and desired to make peace between them. Accordingly, after his breakfast, which was earlier that morning than usual, he betook himself to "The Hall," and was shown into the boudoir where Mrs. Spinks was alone and ready to receive him. Having slept over the matter he had come to the conclusion that it was beneath his dignity, as well as injudicious, to take any further steps towards Joey's chastisement, and was prepared to accede to his mother's tender solicitations on his behalf. Therefore, expecting tears and supplication, he was somewhat taken aback on being received with marked coldness and reserve. Mrs. Spinks did not ask him to sit down, and remained standing herself.

"Perhaps you do not know," she began, "that your father, a few months after your mother's death, did me the great honour of proposing for my hand."

The recollection of what his father had said about the neatest filly he had ever set eyes on flashed across his mind. He bowed and expressed his overwhelming regret that Fate had been so cruel as to deny him such a step-

mother. There was irony in the politeness of his speech and manner, but Mrs. Spinks took no notice and went on :

“ Before I married, my name was Hall, and my father was a tenant of the late Earl of Winterfield. I remember you as a child coming to the farm ; but as you were only four or five years old at the time I speak of, I have no doubt you have no recollection of it.”

Again Lord Winterfield bowed, and expressed a hope that Mrs. Spinks would pardon his having forgotten her.

“ By your father’s dishonourable persecution,” she continued, “ I was driven from the home of my childhood, and went to London. Even there he pursued me, and I was rescued from violence at his hands by Mr. Spinks, who afterwards became my husband.”

“ I can hardly think,” said Lord Winterfield, interrupting, “ that you have sent for me to listen to abuse of one who, whatever his faults may have been, was my father, and is now in his grave. And surely his admiration of such beauty as you must have once possessed can scarcely be deemed a crime. As for the rest, I am quite willing to believe, from all I have heard, that Mr. Spinks was a most estimable man.”

Ignoring the latter part of his speech, she replied :

“ You are quite right, Lord Winterfield, that is not the reason I sent for you ; but I wished first to explain why I tolerated you in my presence or in the neighbourhood, seeing how much I know to the discredit of your family and yourself. I tried to forget about your father, and to make excuses for you. I told myself that I had no right to judge you, no right to cast a stone—but I was wrong. I should have boldly denounced you to the world, and refused to have my house polluted by your presence.”

“ Because, madam, the late Earl of Winterfield had the audacity to lift his eyes to the daughter of one of his tenants ? ”

"No, Lord Winterfield, not for that reason ; but for one with which you are more intimately concerned. Where is Bessie Longman ?"

"Is that a conundrum, Mrs. Spinks ? If so, for the life of me, I cannot guess the answer."

"You lie, Lord Winterfield, like a coward. You know that after you betrayed and deserted her, the poor girl found out that her marriage was nothing but a mockery ; you know that when her child died she went out of her mind ; you know that for years you paid for her maintenance in an asylum ; you know that only this year you ceased the payments—because the wretched woman had destroyed herself ! And you ask me if it is a conundrum ! The riddle to me is how a just and beneficent Creator can suffer so vile a creature as yourself to encumber the surface of His earth !"



“I am sorry, my dear Mrs. Spinks, that you should distress yourself so much about what concerns you so little. If you would only——”

“You are wrong, they do concern me. I have been silent too long, or you could not have insulted Miss Bond, as you have done, by your addresses. I have sent for you to tell you that as soon as you are out of this house I am going straight to Spetchley to tell Mr. Bond all that I have just told you. If you take my advice, you will leave this place within an hour.”

So saying, she rang a hand-bell which stood on the table beside her, and the door opened immediately.

“Bullock, show Lord Winterfield out of the house.”

Without another word, or so much as look at her visitor, she passed through another door into the adjoining room.

In the course of the morning, Mr. Bond, horsewhip in hand, walked down to the village inn, and enquired for Lord Winterfield.

His lordship had gone to town and had not said when he would return.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT had happened to Jessie Bond ? Mrs. Spinks, after her interview with her father, had sought her, expecting to find some traces of that pallor and agitation which Joey had described the evening before ; but she found roses on her cheeks, and the light of happiness in her eyes. In her hand was a telegram she had just received.

"You look in a merry mood, Jessie ; what has happened ?"

"Guess !" said Jessie, laughing, and holding the telegram behind her.

"How can I possibly guess ? Tell me what it is."

"I will, after I have told father. I must tell him first !"

As she spoke, Mr. Bond entered the room. The features which generally wore a jolly, open-hearted, easy-going expression, were set with a look of serious determination.

"Is it true, Jessie," he said, "that Lord Winterfield has been rude to you ?"

"Yes, father," she replied with some embarrassment, "he was."

"Why did you not tell me of it at the time, my child ?"

"Because, father," said the girl, going up to him and putting her hands on his shoulders, "I thought it would worry you, and I knew I should never give him the chance of being rude to me again."

He bent and kissed her forehead, as she looked up at him, and was about to go, but she detained him.

"Father," she said, taking her eyes off his, "Jack has come to England."

"Jack who?"

"Mr. Chatterton."

"Well, my girl, write and ask him to come here."

"He is coming."

"Who asked him?"

"No one—at least, I didn't; but you told him to be sure to come and see us if he came to England."

"When is he coming?"

"By the two o'clock train, father—may I go and meet him?"

Mr. Bond took his child's face between his hands, and looked lovingly upon it. The stern look had left his features, and it was not difficult to read his thoughts.

"I suppose," he said, "you don't want your old father to go with you? Yes, Jessie, you may go; but take one of the grooms to drive you."

The stern, determined look returned as he left the room, and went towards the stables to get his horsewhip.

In happy ignorance of her father's intention, which, as our reader is aware, was frustrated by his lordship's departure, Jessie counted the minutes as they went slowly by, till it was time to start. She was on the platform as the two o'clock train steamed into the station. She caught a glimpse of a face she was looking for, and waved her hand.

Only one passenger got out of the train, and an inquisitive fellow-traveller, leaning out of the window of the next carriage, wondered who the good-looking chap was, and what relation he was to the girl who was there to meet him. Not brother and sister, for they weren't a bit alike—nor husband and wife, for a husband would have kissed that girl—cousins, perhaps—certainly not lovers, they were too cool and collected. He tried in

vain to extract some information from the numerous articles of baggage that were taken out of the van. "He has come to stay some time anyway," thought the inquisitive one; but the guard signalled to the engine-driver, and the train carried him off to solve similar problems—let us hope more successfully—at other stations.

The luggage was soon stowed away in the carriage, and Jessie told the coachman to drive round by the road and wait for them at the stile, as Mr. Chatterton preferred taking the short cut across the fields.

We will neither watch them nor listen to what they say as they walk side by side along the hedgerows.

It may suffice our reader to know that Mr. Chatterton had just been made a partner in his father's firm, and was, therefore, in a position to ask Mr. Bond for the blessing which, on certain conditions, he had promised Lord Winterfield—and also that the carriage had been waiting for them some time at the stile before they appeared.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE hunting-morning early in December, just as Peters was leaving the kennels, he got a message from Hutchins to say the old dog-fox was back again. He was riding the chestnut mare which Joey had given him. She had proved herself all that he first thought her. As he jogged quietly along, he ran his eye over his hounds ; they were fit for anything. And he thought of the number of times that wily old fox had baffled him, and, although the meet was three miles or more from Copley, he set his heart on having another try at him that very morning.

At the meet there was a long consultation. Peters was for going straight off to Copley ; but Parkes and Murray, amongst others, agreed with Joey that, as they had fixed the meet by request to draw certain coverts, which they had not drawn that season, they would give offence if they did not draw them. There were, moreover, several cottagers and small farmers complaining of the damage done by the foxes. Mr. Johnson gave his vote on the same side, so that Peters was practically single-handed against the field, a good many of whom did not believe in certainties, maintaining there was as good a chance of finding in one place as in another.

Peters, however, was, in effect, master of the situation ; for while he obeyed his master's orders to the letter, he managed to evade them in the spirit, by avoiding the most likely places, and hurrying his hounds on more than once when they seemed inclined to dwell upon a stale

line. He thus successfully brought his hounds out of the wood, declaring to Joey that he knew he should draw them blank, and, blowing his horn, trotted off to Copley.

Those who were accustomed to Peters' ways expected something of the sort, and knew well enough what the sound of the horn meant. Jessie Bond, bent on seeing all she could of the fun, always made a practice of riding in Peters' pocket; and Jack Chatterton was, of course, with her. Mr. Johnson, Murray, and Parkes were among the knowing ones; Joey was, naturally, with his hounds, and Colonel Rideabout was there by accident. The rest of the field were left behind discussing politics—or what not?—at the covert side.

Hutchins met Parkes in the road by his farm.

"He's in the old willow," he said; "I saw him go in there this morning as I came from the sheepfold."

From where they stood they could see the brook that wound by the bottom of the meadow, beyond the farm buildings. Beyond the meadow an osier-bed ran some distance by the side of the stream, and on the bank opposite stood a row of old pollard willows; while above them, on the side of the hill, lay the sheep fold, where the shepherd, with one or two men, was at work.

"It's the third tree from this end, Mr. Spinks," said Hutchins, pointing out Reynard's retreat. "You see the one that leans over the brook. He runs up the trunk, and there's as snug a place among the branches as he could find anywhere. He comes down either way; going back the way he came, or jumping from the top on to this bank."

Peters, who had been studying the clouds that were flying before a strong wind, decided that the fox would adopt the latter course, rather than face the hill in the teeth of such a wind; so, calling the first whip, he told him to go round by the bridge, which was some distance

off, to the other side of the stream, where he would put the hounds over to him. "Go quietly," he added, "and see that those men yonder don't put him away before I come down with the hounds."

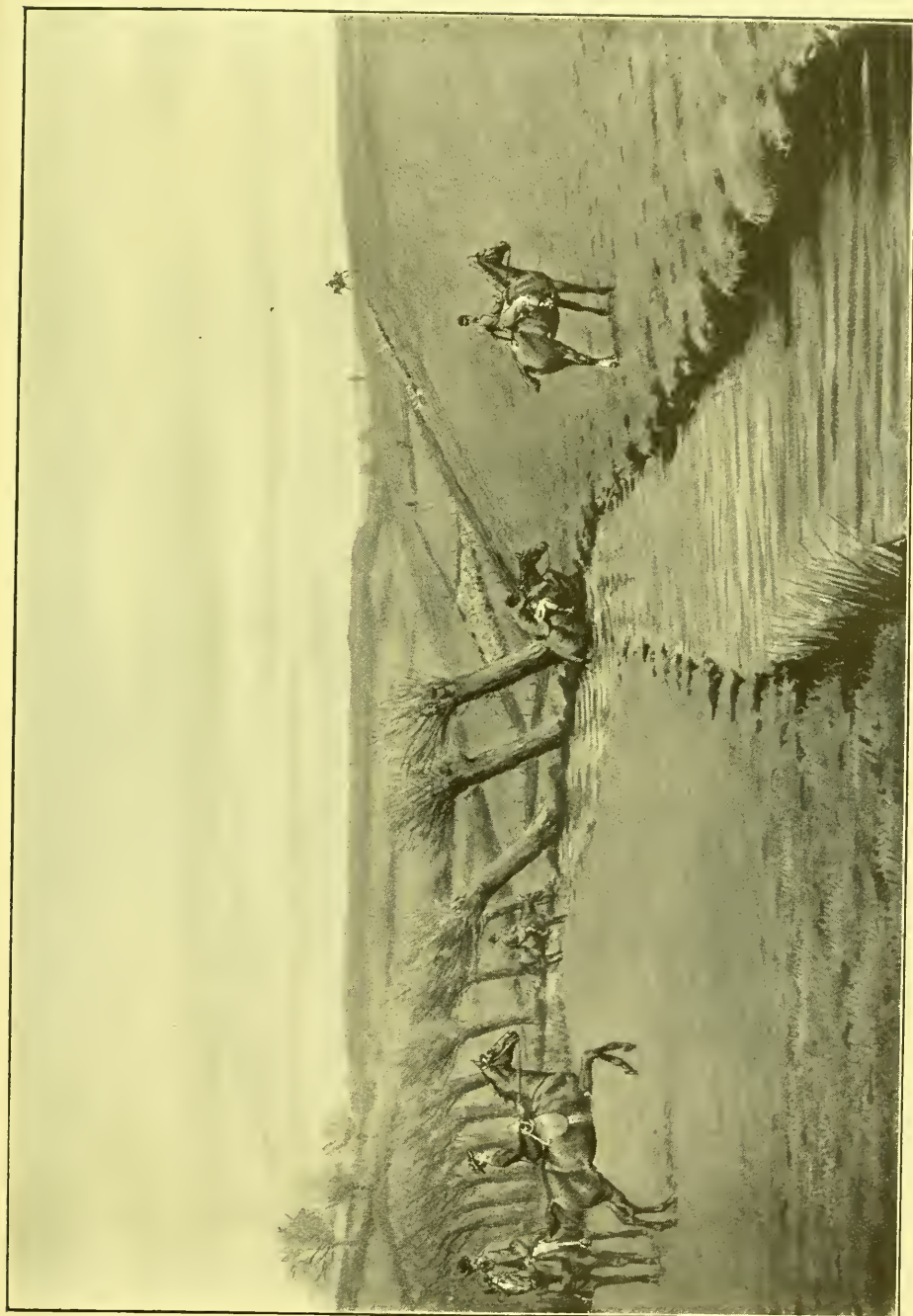
Mr. Johnson, for some reason best known to himself, went with the whip, the others electing to remain with Peters and the hounds.

The fox, in the meantime, had been taking his own view of the situation, and had made up his mind that the men in the sheepfold, who had been there since sunrise, were less dangerous than the new arrivals in the scarlet coats, of which he had already had some disagreeable experience—experience which inclined him to give them as wide a berth as possible. Therefore, the moment he saw Peters descending the meadow with his hounds, he stole quietly from his snug harbour, and, slipping along the bank under the shelter of the sheep-hurdles, presently turned up the hill where it was comparatively sheltered from the wind. Luck was against him, however, for, in spite of his keeping as low as possible in the deepest furrow he could find, the shepherd caught sight of him just as he reached the top of the hill.

At the yell which announced the fact that their quarry had gone away, the hounds in a body splashed into the stream, and, without waiting to shake themselves as they scrambled out on the other side, followed the whip who was cheering them on to the spot where the fox had been viewed.

"Watch me, Miss Bond!" cried Peters, "and do exactly what I do."

So saying, he took his mare by the head, spoke sharply to her, and sent her at full speed towards the brook. The take-off was smooth and sound, and the mare cleared the water with a yard or two to spare. Jessie Bond, imitating Peters exactly, was equally successful.



"JESSIE BOND WAS EQUALLY SUCCESSFUL."

"Come on, Jack, I can't wait for you," she cried, and, giving one look behind her, set off as fast as her good little horse could carry her. Joey and the second whip negotiated the brook higher up. Murray got over too, but he chose a bad place, and, the bank giving way as he landed, he narrowly escaped falling backwards into the stream. Parkes, as usual, had discovered an easier place, where the bank sloped down to the water's edge. His overweighted mare, as well accustomed to his ways as he was to hers, slipped down the bank all four feet together, with her neck craning over the water, and, making a comparatively small jump, landed safely on the further slope.

"For goodness sake give me a lead, Colonel," cried Chatterton ; "I can't get this brute to look at it !"

"I am sorry to say my horse doesn't like water," replied the gallant Colonel, "or I should be most happy."

"But, hang it ! try, man, try ! I have never jumped anything in my life, but I do try !" exclaimed Jack, almost crying with vexation, as his horse for the third time refused and threw him on to his neck.

He could just hear the hounds, and could see Jessie's hat bobbing along the sky-line for a few seconds before it disappeared.

Mr. Johnson and the first whip were the only two with the hounds, and the pace was too good for the others to catch them as long as they went straight.

"He must turn soon," thought Peters, trying all he could to get an occasional glimpse of the leading hounds. "He can't stand up much longer at this pace against this wind." As the thought passed through his mind he saw Mr. Johnson turn left-handed.

"This way, Miss Bond," he cried, turning to the left ; "always turn when the hounds turn. That's right ! you'll soon learn to ride to hounds."

The hounds kept on bearing to the left, and Peters

gradually got nearer to them, continuing his instructions by the way :

“You’re going quite fast enough, Miss Bond; remember you never know how far you may have to go, so save your horse as much as you can. That’s not the way to jump a place like that; you musn’t rush at all fences as if they was the river Thames; you’ll get a fall if you do as sure as possible in a country like this. There, now you



see we are close enough to them for anything. No, not that way, young lady; there’s no use jumping in there after the master, we have to follow Mr. Johnson.”

As they entered a wood he caught the gate as it swung behind his old master, and, swinging it wide for Miss Bond, was the next moment with his hounds, whose cry rang through the trees above them as they crashed through the thick undergrowth.

“Hark! holloa-back, on the right,” cried Joey.

"Another fox, sir," said Peters, as he galloped on down the ride, blowing his horn.

But the hounds paid no attention to horn or holloa, for though they had lowered their noses they still seemed glued to the hunted fox. As they came out into the ride lower down the wood, they swept to the right and raced along the open sward. In another minute they were again flying across the fields towards Wildred's Castle, which was still three miles or more in front of them. The pace was tremendous. Fortunately for Miss Bond, the fences, though frequent, were not formidable. At length they came out on to the open heath. It was a wild tract of country ; heather and gorse covered the undulating ground, and looked dark and bleak beneath the stormy sky. A heavy shower, that struck sharp and cold across the riders' faces, seemed to make the scent even stronger than it was before.

"We shall kill him this time," said Mr. Johnson ; "just look at them !"

"Don't know that, sir," said Peters ; "he's a queer customer, and he ain't had no leisure up to now to show us any of his little tricks."

They now entered the big woods that lay round Wildred's Castle.

"You can't get across there," Murray called out, as Peters pushed his way through the covert towards the brook.

"Come along, sir," cried Peters, to Mr. Johnson ; "come along with me ; don't mind Mr. Murray !"

The next minute he slid down the trench which he had dug some weeks before into the water. The opposite bank was steep, but, thanks to Parkes, not insurmountable.

"I never knew of this place," exclaimed Mr. Johnson, as he followed close behind Peters.

"No more did I till quite lately," replied Peters.

It was as much as Jessie Bond's horse could do, but she caught hold of his mane and they just managed to get to the top.

Here they came to their first check ; but it was only momentary. The hounds turned sharp to the right, then back to the right again.

"Steady, Mr. Spinks. He has been putting in a little bit of work for us. Leave 'em alone, they'll soon unravel it," and the old huntsman stood watching his beauties as they faultlessly followed the invisible thread which the fox had twisted in and out of the thicket. "For'ard on"—they were going ahead once more. Presently they flashed across an open drain and spread through the covert. Peters saw in an instant what had happened. The drain was deep, and ran the full length of the wood. In the winter two or three inches of water lay in the bottom. Without hesitating a second, he galloped on in a line parallel with the drain.

"Get on to him, get on to him !" cried the whips, and the crack of their heavy thongs resounded among the trees. Peters kept on till he was out of the wood, and then cast his hounds along the hedge.

"Yoicks ! Galloper !" What would you have given, dear fellow fox-hunter, to have seen the old hound stoop to the scent under that hedge—dart along the furrow—speak once gently, as if speaking to himself, and then, throwing his tongue, lead the clamorous pack across the plough ? You can understand why Peters hoped—nay, believed—that there would be a pack of hounds, every one of them as good as Galloper, in the next world.

"Hark ! holloa, for'ard !" There was no need to lift the hounds ; they were hunting steadily, and their fox was not far in front of them.

On they went, across the fields, where the frightened sheep fled for safety up the hill, where the cattle lowered

their heads and snorted as they passed, and the plough-boy clung to his leader's bridle. The village schoolboy climbed upon the form to see the hunters gallop down the road, and for the rest of the day drew horses on his slate. The sexton, who had holloed from the churchyard, cheered the hounds across the grassy mound, where lay, perchance, some old-time lover of the sport. Who knows but that his spirit saw the Hunt sweep down the hill by Potter's farm, and through the farmyard, where the ducks hastened to the grass-green pond; thence onward by the old mill, past the brick-kiln, and away into woods beyond, sighing—if spirits sigh—as he laid himself once more to rest.

"Hold hard, there! Hold hard!" Peters shouted, as Colonel Rideabout, followed by a dozen horsemen or more, who had to thank him for ever knowing that the hounds had found, came galloping up the road right across the line in front of the hounds. As the gallant officer reined in his panting steed the hounds came out into the road all amongst the horses' legs.

"You ought to know better," said Peters, as he came up, for he was accustomed to give offenders a bit of his mind, "than to cut in like this in front of the hounds. Turn your horse's head the other way! Turn your horse's head with the hounds! Get out of my way! Get out of my way!" and he pushed roughly between the Colonel and Chatterton, and, passing through a gateway, held his hounds into the field beyond.

Fortunately the scent was good, and no harm had been done.

"For'ard, for'ard," shouted the Colonel, as red as a beetroot, wiping the perspiration from his face, while his hair formed a row of tadpoles' tails on the back of his fat neck. What had he done to make such a fuss about? "For'ard on!" "Capital run!" he exclaimed five

minutes later, as if he had been in it from the start; 'Never saw a better!'

The hounds were running slower and slower, which suited those who wanted to look for gates and gaps—and indeed, most of the horses had had enough jumping for the time.

"Do you hear the jays yonder?" said Peters, pointing to a wood not far away. "I expects they are tally-ing the fox; he's waiting for us somewhere about there. Keep your eyes open, Mr. Spinks, you may get a look at him."

The hounds entered the wood, full cry, but about the centre of it turned short.

"Look back! Look back!" cried Peters.

"Tally-ho! Tally-ho back!" yelled Parkes, and Peters came back through the wood blowing his horn. Again the fox doubled, in the hope of baffling his pursuers, but in vain. They turned, and as he turned once more, again they turned.

Peters was standing half-way down the wood.

"Look back! Look back!" he cried in pleading tones to Chatterton, who was wondering what it all meant. "Don't look at me! Don't look at me! I say look back!" There was another holloa, and Peters came galloping back again.

"Where are the whips? There's nobody to help me! I shall lose him, I know I shall! There, I told you so," he cried, as the hounds suddenly became silent. "Don't let him get out! Keep your eye down that ride, Murray! Pop your whip, my dear young lady! For goodness' sake don't let him get away!"

"Tally-ho, gone away!" came from the far end of the wood, and the next minute the hounds were running once more in the open.

"Yonder he goes!" exclaimed Mr. Johnson, as he viewed the fox crawling under the bank, a field and a half in front of the hounds.

On went Peters, holloaing and blowing his horn. Crack ! crack ! went the whips, and the hounds went after him. He laid them on again where he had last seen the fox. The bank was honeycombed with rabbit-holes.

“Who-ooop ! gone to ground !”

It was a small place, and a young ash-tree grew immediately above the hole, into which the beaten fox had crept with his last hope.

The first whip threw himself from his horse.



“Who-ooop !” he cried, seizing the ash-tree and bending it towards the ground. Parkes came to his assistance, Under the combined weight the roots gave way, and, as Parkes came tumbling with a great part of the bank into the field, the hounds rushed in and killed their fox.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As we glance our critical eye over the pages of Joey's diary, we come to the conclusion that Peters was right, and that the events so minutely detailed therein have little interest for the general reader. And yet, among the voluminous account of "clinkers," "bursts," and "good hunting runs," we note here and there an event, a precept, or a touch of nature, which may interest anyone who wishes to know more of Joey and his friends, and will lead up to the events of the following spring, with which our story concludes.

We reluctantly pass over the glowing description of the famous run, at the end of which Joey presented the brush to Mary Brain, the account of the day on which Peters killed five foxes, and the story of the fox who, according to Peters, "must have concealed himself somehow," as well as the remarks on the bloodthirstiness of the old huntsman, and Mr. Johnson's dissertations—quoted at length with loving hand by an admiring pupil—on the craft of woodland-hunting.

Some of the entries may cause surprise. For instance—"Dec. 19.—Mrs. Bond was out on wheels." Who of our readers does not imagine Mr. Bond a widower, having forgotten that his wife was one of the guests at Joey's dinner party. The MS. continues: "She is a charming lady, but her deafness is a great drawback; it prevents her joining in any fun that is going on. She says she

likes to hear her daughter sing because she looks so lovely !”

This lady, however, since the announcement, early in December, of the engagement of her daughter to Mr. Chatterton, was become anything but a cipher in the house, where preparations were being hurried forward for the marriage, which was fixed to take place about the middle of April.

Whether it was that example is contagious, or that he was jealous of his friends' happiness, to which the diary makes constant allusions, Joey appears at this time to have taken little pains to disguise from himself, however much he may have concealed from others, his sentiments and intentions regarding Miss Brain. As he hunted only two days a week, with an occasional bye-day, the remaining days of the week afforded ample opportunity of gratifying these sentiments, and of supplying fuel for the ever-increasing passion that was consuming him. The ladies were expected to luncheon at every shooting party, and they were even invited to a picnic at Wildred's Castle, where, in spite of wind and weather, they turned up in waterproofs and goloshes.

It was on this occasion that, stealing away with Miss Brain along the brook, Joey, in strictest confidence, told her the history of Peter's "folly."

"It was very kind of you to forgive the dear old thing so readily," said the girl, after Joey had come to the end of his tale. "You don't know him as well as I do. It is so like him. The whip told me once that no one who had heard Peters pitching into him in the hunting-field would believe how kind and considerate he was at home. But really I do think he ought not to be allowed to abuse people as he does."

"Can you prevent him?" replied Joey laughing. "I'm sure I could not, and what's more I don't want to

try, for I believe the more abuse I get the quicker I shall learn. Hard words don't hurt anybody ; but never let him know that I have told you all this, for I promised not to breathe a word of it to anyone—though somehow I don't feel as if my promise included you—you are different."

They were standing on the edge of the brook, contemplating, regardless of the drizzling rain, the trench which was now well worn by the passing of many horsemen. Deeply in love, and fully convinced that his future happiness could only be assured by a favourable answer to the question he had long ago made up his mind to ask, now that the critical moment had arrived, Joey felt his courage oozing through his finger-tips. Had he needed an incentive he might have found one in the natural curls that wantoned, the more crisply for the rain, about her ear, but whatever emphasized her beauty only increased his hesitation ; the object of his affections had become endowed with more than the attributes of an angel, and seemed to be receding further and further beyond his reach. At length, breaking the long silence, he repeated, "Somehow, you are different."

"I can imagine the dear old thing slipping into the brook," said the girl, as if she had not been listening ; "do you think the hounds entered into the joke?" *

She turned to Joey as she spoke, and her laughing eyes drove him to desperation.

"Miss Brain!" he began, but at that instant Colonel Rideabout's voice was heard exclaiming, "Oh ! here you are ! I've been looking for you everywhere. Didn't you hear us shouting ? Mrs. Spinks says it is ridiculous staying out any longer in the rain ; you are to come back at once." So back they went, feeling like whipped school-children, to the ruins, where they found the rest of the party all eager to be off ; and the all-important question remained

unasked. The next day Joey felt the full force of the saying, "he who hesitates is lost," when, on meeting Mr. Brain in the hunting-field, he learned that his daughter had caught a violent chill, and had been ordered by the doctor to keep her bed. This *contretemps*, which will surprise no one, put an end, for the time being, to Joey's love-making, and a severe frost, as if something were wanting to complete his misery, at the same time stopped all idea of hunting. The following extracts from his diary show how he employed his days, and give other not uninteresting information.

"*January 10th.*—Eighth day's hard frost. I don't think we shall ever hunt again, and don't believe Peters could get through it if he didn't sleep nearly the whole time. Rode over early to enquire for M.B. The doctor says she is out of danger. What folly to think of having a picnic at this time of year—never again! Played hockey on the ice at Spetchley in the afternoon, stayed dinner, and skated again by torchlight. Parkes and Murray tried to waltz, but fell and went through, fortunately not in a deep place.

"*January 11th.*—Drove over to enquire for M.B. She is better, but still in bed. Went out shooting with Mr. Brain, and shot a leporine, the first one I have seen. I see in to-day's paper that Crichton has got fourteen years for forgery. That's the end of him. I think I got rid of him very cheap. Bullock on the subject is worth hearing.

"*January 26th.*—M.B. downstairs and prettier than ever. Heard of the engagement of Lord Winterfield to Mrs. Swine-le-Fevre. Mr. Johnson knows all about her and says they are well matched. It looks like a change in the weather."

This prophecy, made without any assistance from the clerk of the weather, came true. The frost broke up,



Peters awoke, and as Mary Brain advanced towards convalescence, the diary relapsed into a dull monotony, which is scarcely broken till February 14th, when the receipt of a valentine is duly recorded. The valentine was a fox's brush with scarcely a hair on it, to which was attached a silver label engraved with the words "killed by J.S." Joey at once fixed on Parkes as the author of this pleasantry, and, as he had long fancied that "old Tom" secretly aspired to win the affections of Mary Brain, he resolved to take his revenge by anticipating his rival. These premature conclusions, however, were rudely upset when,

on confiding his intentions to Jessie Bond, he learned from her that Mary Brain herself, and not Parkes, was responsible for the miserable jest. Such a discovery hardly added to Joey's peace of mind, for he found himself unable to resolve the ambiguity, whether the valentine augured well or ill for his projected proposal. It was with feelings alternating between moderate hope and the deepest despair that he awaited the advent of the Tuesday in the following week, when the hounds were to meet at Mr. Brain's house. That eventful morning at length dawned, and, with a blue sky overhead and a crisp road beneath his horse's feet, Joey rode forth, determined to propose or perish in the attempt.

The foxes in Mr. Brain's district had been of late more voracious than usual, and a number of farmers had assembled at the Hunt breakfast, not to complain of the depredations they had suffered, but to acknowledge the generosity of their young M.F.H., who had so promptly responded to their claims. On entering the room, Joey was received with prolonged applause, during which he was shown to a seat at the far end of the table presided over by his host. As the applause subsided, an old man, the oldest farmer in the Hunt, rose to his feet and, with a rough and simple eloquence, proposed the health of the young Master. The hearty simplicity of this spontaneous greeting went far to banish any nervousness that Joey might have felt, and, rising as the old man resumed his seat, he began :

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I am very pleased to think that so far my mastership has more than satisfied your expectations. With regard to the poultry bill, fortunately for you and myself, I have, through no merit of my own, enough of this world's goods to indulge to my heart's content in the sport to which we are one and all devoted, and I can assure you that that particular bill is the only

one I really like paying ; but it is not money that makes sport—it is the sportsman ! Let me give the credit where it is due : to the farmers who let us ride over their land, and, I fear, occasionally break a top-rail ; and to our friend Peters, compared with whom, the oldest and most knowing of us will confess to being a baby-in-arms in the matter of fox-hunting. One thing I have noticed about the Bosby hounds is that I never hear anyone say there is no scent. On the worst scenting day, the hounds have to be whipped off at dark, with a moderate scent they kill their fox, and with a burning scent they run clean away from the best of us. This, in my humble opinion, is due to two men, and to them only—I mean Mr. Johnson and his old huntsman. So let us drink long life and happiness to them both, and be off, for I suspect our feasting and speech-making is trying Peters' patience beyond what it can bear."

This last remark brought about an immediate adjournment, and Peters, being told to move on, lost no time in throwing off ; within a quarter of an hour the hounds were leaving covert on the back of a fine dog-fox. The day, however, soon showed that it was not to be classed under the third head of Joey's category, for, although anyone who wanted to see hounds work had to keep going, after ten minutes a moderate horse could live comfortably with the hounds. Still on they went, carrying the scent over grass and over plough, now fast, now slow, with here and there a momentary check, which forced them to spread with noses to the ground and lips a-tremble ; but once more "hark to Galloper"—how instantly they gather and endorse the note !

They have been running for an hour or more, and Joey has piloted Mary Brain from the start. She has confessed to sending the obnoxious valentine, and he has forgiven her : what else could he have done ? And now

they are alone, a wood through which the hounds are working slowly separating them from the rest of the field.

"Miss Brain," Joey began abruptly, speaking, for no apparent reason, somewhat huskily, "may I tell you how much I love you?" She was silent; so, taking her hand, in a few incoherent sentences he told his tale, and, with feelings more easily imagined than described, awaited her reply. The hounds, too, were silent, as if listening for the word that was to decide his fate. None came, however, but the look she gave him seemed a satisfactory answer, for, emboldened by their horses' proximity, he put his arm round her and imprinted a kiss upon her blushing cheek. Ere he could have fully appreciated the ecstasy of his situation, a "holloa" came faintly from the distance. Was the sound ever so unwelcome, or did Joey ever again repent—supposing even that he repented on this occasion—of going to a "holloa" in so leisurely a fashion?

It so happened that a neighbouring pack, belonging to Lord Everton, had run towards the same point, and the two huntsmen, each ignorant of the other's propinquity, their hounds being at fault, lifted them and galloped to the same holloa, and, as Lord Everton's hounds hit off the scent just as Peters came up, the consequence, almost inevitable, was that the two packs joined, and, before any one was aware what had happened, were racing together at redoubled speed only a minute or two behind their fox. The impossibility of determining by which pack the fox now being hunted had been found gave rise to a point of etiquette—the question being, which of the two huntsmen should hunt the combined packs. It was certainly the privilege of age, but as Peters and Lord Everton's huntsman, with equal courtesy, waived that distinction—the latter declaring he was only fifty-five, while the former solemnly asseverated that "he didn't know as how he was

more than four-and-fifty (whereas both, as a matter of fact, had distinct recollection of things that happened in the last century)—the difficulty was solved by Lord Everton, who decided that the whiter head should take precedence. Peters, accordingly, was appointed commander-in-chief and his fellow huntsman, with perfect grace and good feeling, joined the rank and file.

This little episode of the hunting-field will be appreciated by anyone who has chanced to see, under similar circumstances, the undignified exhibition of two huntsmen, each unwilling to give way, riding one against the other with ill-humoured jealousy, eventually losing their fox between them, and parting with mutual reproaches and animosity. Unfortunately, on the present occasion, there was little time for Peters to display his generalship, as the increased pressure brought to bear on the fox soon drove that astonished animal to ground. Joey and his companion, for reasons already explained, were perplexed at finding forty couple of hounds baying round the earth, attended by a double contingent of horsemen. After a brief consultation, without even a dissentient vote from Peters, reynard's retreat was decided to be impregnable, and the huntsmen were ordered to draw off their hounds.

"How will they ever separate them, Joey?" said Mary Brain, the last word being almost inaudible.

Never having seen it done, Joey was unable to give an answer to the question, but the operation, seemingly so difficult, was carried out simply enough. The two huntsmen, drawing the hounds in a body on to the high road, which was close by, separated, one going to the left, the other to the right, and every hound followed his own master. The two packs were thus divided in less time than it takes to describe how it was done, and the Bosby Hunt returned to draw for a fresh fox in their own country.

Flushed with his late success, our hero felt equal to anything, so, leaving Mary Brain to trot on by herself in the rear of the hounds, he waited for her father, who rode last of the cavalcade, and boldly demanded of him his daughter's hand in marriage. Mr. Brain, thus peremptorily addressed, could not resist the temptation of amusing himself awhile at the boy's expense, and began to expostulate with him on the ground of his extreme youthfulness, advising him to wait a year or two till he had had more experiences of affairs of the heart.

"Who knows," he said, "but that you may yet find a dozen charmers, each more irresistible than the last."

To the charge of youth Joey pleaded guilty, but declared that his resolution was unalterably fixed, and that, should he be obliged to wait, he would out-Jacob Jacob. At length, thinking he had teased the boy enough, Mr. Brain promised that if he found his daughter equally determined and certain of her own constancy, he would give his consent.

Joey's feelings may be summed up in his own words, "This is the happiest day of my life !"

The desire to tell Peters of his engagement as they rode home together in the dusk of the winter evening was almost irresistible. Two weighty reasons, however, prevented it—the first, his resolve that his mother should be the earliest recipient of his confidence ; the second, his promise to Mary Brain not to tell Peters except in her presence.

It was, therefore, with the utmost impatience that he awaited her first visit to Bosby as his *fiancée*, and the moment she arrived carried her off to the kennels, where they found Peters and Sam in the field among the hounds. If Joey expected the knowing old huntsman to be surprised, he was disappointed, for, on hearing the news his eyes twinkled, and, taking the girl's hand in his

right hand, and Joey's in his left, he said, "And right glad am I to hear it, my dear young lady. I've noticed Mr. Joseph feathering for some time, and thought he would have opened before."

As for Sam, he made no attempt at congratulating the happy couple, but stood chuckling internally, giving no external sign of emotion save a slight exaggeration of his ordinary squint.



IN THE PADDOCK.—Page 275.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CLOUDS of dust and bursting hedgerows proclaimed an early spring, and the close of a successful hunting season found Peters fondly watching his chestnut mare nabbing the lawn-mower in the paddock, and the other inhabitants of Bosby engrossed in the two weddings that were shortly to take place.

Wedding presents were pouring in at "The Hall." From Mr. Charles Murray came a gold-mounted hunting-crop, a silver salver from Mr. Marshall, and from his sister an antimacassar worked by her own hand. Peters sent a gold fox-head pin, and his wife the photograph of her husband on "the little chestnut." Sam's contribution was a dog-whip with a wondrous heavy thong, while the two whips expressed their artistic taste in a large silver-rimmed beer-jug, embossed with three couple of hounds in close pursuit of the biggest fox on record. Mr. Thomas Parkes, who was reported to have invented a new cork, and to have sold the patent for a "p-p-pot of money," presented Mary Brain with a diamond star.

At Spetchley, Mr. Bond was in his element superintending operations which were being carried out on a scale simply magnificent, while his wife's time was fully occupied by the bridesmaid's dresses and her daughter's trousseau.

For a description of Jessie Bond's wedding, at which Joey acted as best man we will turn for the last time to his diary.

"*April 17th.*—I have had my preliminary canter ; every-

thing went off splendidly. Jack and I got to the church too early, and he was desperately nervous by the time Jessie arrived. She looked awfully well coming up the aisle with her father—so did M. The bride's bouquet was magnificent, and she wore her great-great-grandmother's veil. She spoke up well, and wasn't in the least nervous. Jack, too, did pretty well in that respect, when it came to the put to. The village choir sang an anthem they had been practising for weeks. In the middle of it Jessie



caught my eye, and I saw her hand shaking. She told me afterwards she couldn't help it. Old Bond shed the only tears. It must be trying to give away one's only child, but they say he weeps on every possible occasion. Mr. Marshall said a few words off his own bat. What he said was very earnest and in my opinion wonderfully practical. I noticed Jessie listening intently. They say he went the pace when he was at Oxford, but I don't think it could have been very terrific. As we came out of the vestry the schoolmaster struck up the wedding-march on the

harmonium!—I really must give them an organ. Nothing could have been more sumptuous than the wedding-breakfast—everything came from London. There was a good deal of speechifying. Old Bond's speech was—to use his own favourite word—superb, and I returned thanks for the bridesmaids. We all drove down to the station and sent them off with showers of rice and slippers.

“When I said good-night to M., she slipped a bit of paper into my hand. It is a hunting-song—I had no idea she wrote poetry. Perhaps I am not a fair judge, but it seems to me pretty good; above the average, certainly. She says she has invented a tune for it, and will teach it to me, so that I may sing it to her on my birthday. I like the chorus—I will write it down here lest by any chance I lose the original—

This life is a hunt in the vale of years—
 The quarry Dame Fortune—our wits the pack—
 Our whipper-in Poverty—Hope our spurs,
 As for'ard we gallop on Energy's back.
 The chase may be long, but young is the day;
 The scent is breast-high, so come for'ard away.

Chorus—

Then a cheer for the huntsman, a cheer for the whip,
 And a cheer for the horse and the hound,
 And one more for the fox, with a 'hip-hip-hip
 And hoorah' for the fun
 Of a jolly good run,
 And the sportsman who never goes round.

But Fortune's a vixen, and full of wiles;
 She turns and she doubles—the pack is at fault;
 And what with the ditches, and banks, and stiles,
 Poor Energy's blowing and longing to halt.
 In vain is the cast, and alack! for the day—
 But 'Hark, holloa for'ard!'—come for'ard away!

Chorus—Then a cheer, &c.

A few catch their quarry, and many do not—
 For some lose their wits ere the day is begun;
 While others, who scarcely can raise a trot,
 Are still far behind when the day is done.
 The sun is still high, there is hope while there's day;
 And Fortune is for'ard—so for'ard away!

Chorus—Then a cheer, &c.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IT is the evening of May 20th—Joey's wedding-day. Mrs. Spinks and her guests have retired from the servants' hall after drinking the health of the bride and bridegroom. George Bullock and an enormous bunch of flowers that has adorned his faithful breast during the day occupies one end of the festive board, round which is ranged the entire retinue of Bosby Hall. The table cleared, the punch-bowl set in the midst, cigars handed round, all tongues are loosened. The housekeeper takes the lead: "It's the prettiest wedding, according to my notions, that has ever been seen, or ever will be seen, in Bosby."

"Not so grand as Miss Bond's, may be," says the butler, backing up the housekeeper, "but more 'omely like. Things was done more tasty; the lilac arches, for instance, along the road and all down the village, I call a triumph of art. Mr. Roberts, I looks towards you; they do you credit!"

The gardener, thus addressed, bows acknowledgment of the compliment from so high an authority, and says he has done all in his power; he doesn't think there is a scrap of lilac left in the country for miles round.

"Didn't she look just lovely?" says one of the under-housemaids to the first whip.

"And Mr. Joseph, too!" exclaims her superior, who is a great admirer of her young master's physiognomy, "There can be no manner of doubt but what they are the 'andsomest couple what ever stepped into that church."



"To my mind"—the butler again gives his opinion—"she mostly resembles that picture by Mr. Raffle as 'angs in the front 'all—not too 'umble, nor yet too 'aughty."

"All I know is," says Peters, "the next generation will

be very good fox-hunters, and here's long life to the bride and bridegroom and many of 'em !”

“Peters ! Peters !” comes a warning voice across the table, but the toast is received with acclamation. Peters fills his glass from the punch-bowl, which he passes on to Sam. The bowl goes round, is emptied and filled again—and so on till midnight brings the revelry to a close.



“Sam, you're very silent to-night,” said Peters, as they went home together. “What's wrong with you ? What have you done with the orange blossom you got from Mrs. Joseph ?”

Sam did not think it necessary to explain that it was his wedding-day as well as Joey's, or that he had laid the fragrant token upon a humble mound behind the village church.

THE END.

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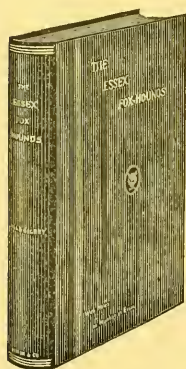
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